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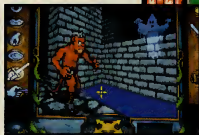
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**MPA**

# EDITOR'S NOTES

It may sound like a cliché, but we think you'll find this issue to be one of our most exciting to date. Software houses are hustling to utilize the latest in hardware capabilities and display formats, greater memory, and new storage mediums, and the results are impressive. For owners of older PCs, this new breed of software will hasten the need to upgrade to a new system. But gamers who already own 386 and 486 systems will finally be seeing titles developed especially for those machines, and we've included in-depth coverage on several of these products.

The proof of this latest trend in game development could be found at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago this past June. For the first time in the history of the show, consumers were admitted (not during the first two days, however), and though some PC game publishers left early to avoid the crush, we saw more titles previewed than ever before — over 100 in all. If you weren't able to make it to

Chicago, you'll want to check out Lance Elko's 8-page CES roundup on page 28. It's chock-full of information and screen shots, and should give you a good idea of what to look for in the month ahead.

One of the standouts at the show was *Links 386 Pro* from Access Software. The first game to require Super VGA graphics and a 386 microprocessor, it leads the way in a new generation of PC golf simulations that elevate this popular genre to new heights of realism and playability. Our close-up look at *Links 386 Pro* and several other impressive new golf sims is on page 20.

*Game Players PC Entertainment* is here for you, the PC gamer, and we'd love to hear your comments on what you'd like to see in future issues. We can't answer every letter personally, but we always take your suggestions and ideas to heart. Drop us a line and let us know what you think. In the meantime, happy gaming!

Stephen Poole  
Associate Editor

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## SPACE ACE II: BORF'S REVENGE

*Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* appeared in the mid-80's as the first laser-disc arcade games. They were groundbreaking for their time, and conversions of both games eventually appeared on most computer systems. In fact, ReadySoft has released three *Dragon's Lair* titles for the PC as well as *Space Ace*, and now comes *Space Ace II: Borf's Revenge*. Unfortunately, it looks as though it's time to lay these games to rest.

Like the original arcade game, playing *Space Ace II* means making the correct move on the joystick or pressing the fire button at a precise time during animated sequences in order to make it to the next sequence. If your timing is off or you make the wrong move, you lose a life and have to try again. After a few minutes, this pattern eliminates any element of enjoyment, and game play becomes a weary exercise in maneuvering the joystick. To their credit, ReadySoft includes hints in the manual for correct movements; without them, any chance for success is slim.

Another sore point is the title itself. As with *Dragon's Lair: Escape from Singe's Castle*, *Space Ace II* is not a true sequel to the original game. It is



merely a collection of loosely assembled sequences from the laser-disc *Space Ace* which were left out of the original *Space Ace* conversion to save on disk storage space (or to use in a sequel). Together, *Space Ace* and *Space Ace II* contain most of the sequences from the laser disc game, so hopefully there's not enough left from the original arcade game to produce a *Space Ace III*.

There's no denying that *Space Ace II* is a joy to watch. Its fast animation, beautiful graphics, and wonderful music and sound effects are fine and dandy, but the poor interactive element makes it a far cry from what most people consider a game. With the fluid game play and incredible storage space afforded by CD-ROM technology, ReadySoft should forget about any future disk-based versions of laser-disc games, and instead present the *Space Ace* and *Dragon's Lair* games the way they were meant to be played. Until then, their conversions just won't satisfy players like me who can remember the fun of those games in the arcade.

— Russ Ceccola



## MICROLEAGUE FANTASY MANAGER

To get a fantasy baseball league up and running, you need to do two things. First, you have to find about a half-dozen or more friends who agree with sportswriter Tom Boswell that life begins on opening day. Then you have to convince some selfless soul among this group to act as league statistician/commissioner.

If volunteers are lacking, you could subscribe to one of the stats services that have sprung up over the last few years. These outfits will do your statistical dirty work for you, but it'll cost \$25 to \$125 per team.

The size and composition of team rosters, the fees for different transactions, and the scoring methods used to determine league rankings. There are as many types of fantasy baseball as there are brands of cola, but *Fantasy Manager* should be able to accommodate most leagues without problem. Another attractive feature lets you automatically download stats from the USA TODAY Sports Center. Users pay for the privilege—\$119.95 for 30 downloads—but a ten-team league will realize substantial savings over the cost of a stats service. Alternatively,

leagues without a modem can get the same data on weekly disks from the Sports Center. Either way, the process of updating stats is quick and hassle-free.

But *Fantasy Manager* shows clear signs of having been rushed to market in time for the start of the baseball (and fantasy league) season.

There's a 12-page addendum to the manual, and MicroLeague also ended up issuing a revised version of the program almost immediately after its release. The quick fix had even more manual addendum, including instructions on how to load the player data file, which is absolutely necessary for the program to run.

By the time this review appears in print, baseball season will be more than half over, meaning there's little reason to consider purchasing *Fantasy Manager* until next year anyway. Hopefully MicroLeague will have ironed out any remaining wrinkles by then.

— Jeff Seiken

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5. R. MILLIGAN	6. M. PUCKETT		
F3 TRADE			
1. B. BRUEGER	2. F. D. BAERGA		
3. C. FISK	4. R. VILLARRE		
5. D.	6. S. SAX		
7. F.			

Or you can pick up a copy of *MicroLeague Fantasy Manager*, a labor-saving utility from MicroLeague Sports that enables you to run a fantasy baseball league right from your desktop. The program compiles statistics, tabulates transactions costs, prints reports, and even computes each winner's share of the prize money at the end of the season. About the only thing it won't do is field those late-night phone calls from anxious managers wondering if Darryl Strawberry has been placed on injured reserve.

Flexibility is one of the fortes of *Fantasy Manager*. The program allows you to specify



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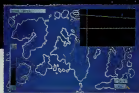
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## VOLFIED

This Readysoft release, originally a Taito coin-op hit, is a direct descendant of the '80s arcade hit *Qix* (in fact, the Sega Genesis version of *Volfied* is called *Ultimate Qix*). There's some hilarious claptrap at the start about spaceships and alien invaders, but it's the emphasis on speed, reflexes, and strategy — not an interstellar setting — that gives *Volfied* its appeal.

You start each of the game's 16 levels with your ship sitting on the border of a rectangle that takes up the entire screen. Your goal is to carve out sections by heading into the rectangle and returning to the border. Carve out at least 80 percent and you move to the next level.

Inside the rectangle is a "boss alien" accompanied by several smaller but similar creatures — floating hands, disembodied skulls, killer crabs, vicious wasps, and so on. These critters fire blasts and chase you while you're carving out sections, and the boss shoots a barrage of laser blasts at regular intervals. You're safe from all attacks while you're on the border unless you're shield has been drained (i.e., time has expired

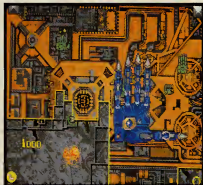
for that level).

Thank goodness those nasties aren't the only things inside the rectangle. By carving out sections with bonus squares you earn power-ups that freeze all creatures on-screen, arm you with lasers, give you extra speed, or extend the time to complete the level.

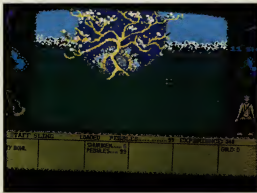
There are a few noticeable problems here. We couldn't enter the copy-protection code on half of the PCs on which we installed the game (after unplugging the joystick, we succeeded on all but one computer). We were never able to play the game with a joystick or game pad, and sound card support is limited to music in between levels. And if you enter the wrong copy-protection code (easy to do, thanks to the nearly invisible codesheet) the game lets you play one level before locking up your computer. No CTL+ALT+DEL here — only a cold boot will get you back up again.

But *Volfied* is one of those games that you wind up loving in spite of its nagging design flaws and oversights. Its attractive graphics and simple yet absorbing game play make it a great choice for arcade fans.

— Stephen Poole



## SLEEPING GODS LIE



As fantasy role-playing games go, this ReadySoft release is one of the most unusual. You won't find the elaborate character creation, the step-by-step movement, the multi-player party, the item management needs, or almost anything else you'd expect in a typical game from this genre. In its place is a simple, elegant, and yet sometimes awkward system, one that will fascinate some players and leave others cold.

You start the game in a room: just you, and a strangely designed screen. The large viewing area shows a first-person viewpoint, and six information icons surround it. One is a compass, another a clock; other icons indicate your stamina, your "magical presence" (i.e., how detectable you are by magical creatures), your current weapon, and your clothing. At the bottom is a text screen, which displays weapon and ammunition status, the game score, and anything that happens as you adventure.

Adventuring is a matter of moving and firing your weapon, and not much more. To move, you push the mouse or joystick in the appropriate direction (you can also use the keypad). To fire, click the

mouse or joystick button or press the space bar. Except for your bare hands, all weapons are missile weapons, and firing them is quite realistic in that you must "lead" the target to hit it. The most difficult part of the interface is learning to move and fire at the same time; to fully master it, it's best to use the keypad for movement while firing with the mouse. In fact, this is the part of the game that will make or break most players' interest because it takes considerable practice. To move forward, for instance, you push up on the mouse to shove the cursor to the top of the screen. But to fire using the mouse, you must move the cursor to your targeted point, which usually means that you stop moving forward at the same time. This problem is alleviated if you use separate control methods for firing and moving.

With eight separate worlds to move through, and lots to do in each, *Sleeping Gods Lie* is playable for a long time. It spares the overwhelming detail of most FRP games, yet it manages to keep the notion of exploration interesting.

— Neil Randall

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## PAPERBOY 2

*Paperboy* was a very successful arcade game which subsequently wound up on almost every major type of computer and videogame system. *Paperboy 2*, from *Activision*, seems to be following in its tracks, with versions available for PCs, the NES, Super NES and Game Boy.

The PC version is on par with the Super NES version, sporting fluid game play, nice sound effects, better graphics, and all the variety and new features you expect in a well-made sequel. *Paperboy 2* far surpasses the original in many

extra points during the regular game by performing stunts, hitting special targets, and avoiding dangerous animals and people.

*Paperboy 2* adds some new elements to jazz things up. Perhaps the most noticeable change is that in addition to the bottom-left to top-right scrolling of *Paperboy*, half of each route now scrolls from the bottom-right to top-left. Unlike the original, you can play as a paperboy or paper-girl. Bonus rounds feature more ramps and obstacles, and there are many more targets on the street. The original game sported the same houses every day, but now the layout of the street is modified every week, with bigger houses and new locales such as the carnival, park, and mall.

Graphics in *Paperboy 2* are colorful and cartoonish, from the



ways, giving *Paperboy* fans plenty of reasons to get excited once again.

In *Paperboy 2* you deliver papers to the front doorsteps or, if possible, to the mailboxes of the subscribers on your route, while at the same time using papers to eliminate obstacles and enemies and to damage houses of nonsubscribers. If you don't deliver a paper to a subscriber, he cancels his subscription; successfully deliver papers to every subscriber, and you gain back one of the cancelled subscribers. At the end of the week, you cruise down a bonus course, hitting as many targets as possible with papers on your way to the finish line. You earn

fire-breathing gargoyles to the sunbathing babes. A newspaper headline reports your progress, and introduces each day with a helpful hint of the dangers ahead — the kind of little touches that a spectator will enjoy as much as the player.

The manual is very brief, and leaves out at least one crucial bit of info: to play *Paperboy 2* with a joystick, you must type "pb j" at the DOS prompt. Apart from that oversight, *Paperboy 2* delivers all that it promises.

— Russ Ceccola

## DUSK OF THE GODS



Here is a prime example of an excellent game concept undone by basic design flaws. The player takes the role of an "Einhojer," a champion of the Norse god Odin, and embarks on a quest through the realms of Midgard, Asgard, Jotunheim, etc., seeking ways to help the Gods achieve victory in the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarok.

Good concept: different, fresh, full of potential. Terrific graphics, too, and a nicely intuitive interface. If the execution in *Dusk of the Gods* only matched its setup, *Interstel* (who is publishing the game

Wagner's *Ring Cycle* without hearing any of the music. And the bogus medievalisms of the prolix dialogue screens are hysterically (albeit unintentionally) funny.

What gives this ambitious but unfortunately confused product the *coup de grace*, however, is its manual. To speak plainly, it is a disgrace. It's hopelessly disorganized and incomplete (nowhere do we get an explanation of the game's odd, boring system of combat, for example), and there isn't a single page that's not marred by the most basic

and egregious mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Entire paragraphs of important information are turned into virtual gibberish, thanks to missing words, typos, and syntax that seems to have been put together by someone for



whom English is a foreign tongue.

*Interstel* should withdraw this game from the market until the manual can be fixed by someone who knows how to write and proofread. Introducing a product with this kind of documentation makes the same impression as handing someone a business card with your name scrawled on it in crayon.

— William R. Trotter

for its creators, *Event Horizon* Software), would have had a contender.

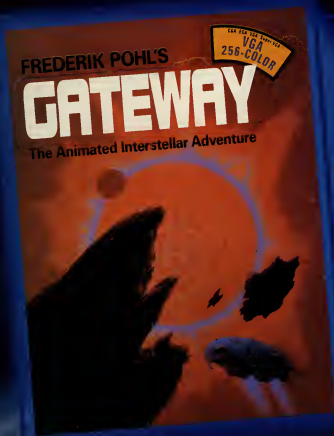
Alas, the game almost sinks beneath the creaking weight and glacial pace of its endless opening section, during which the hero wanders around Odin's palace trying to absorb great indigestible wads of Norse mythology and vainly trying to keep track of the relationships of dozens and dozens of obscure characters. It's about as entertaining as reading through the libretto of

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## HONG KONG MAHJONG PRO

This Nine Dragons Software game, distributed by Electronic Arts, isn't a solitaire tile game in the *Shanghai* or *Dragon's Eye* mold, although the games use the same set of tiles.

Instead, *Hong Kong Mahjong Pro* is played a little like gin rummy. You begin with 13 tiles from six sets: balls, sticks, characters, winds, dragons, and flowers. The balls, sticks, and characters are numbered from one to nine; there are four winds and flowers and three dragons. As with a deck of cards, there are four tiles of each design.

The object of the game is to collect four sets of tiles plus a single matching pair. Sets are made by matching three identical tiles (a *pong*), four identical tiles (a *kong*), or three tiles in numerical sequence (a *chow*). Tiles can be collected from the board (called the wall) or from discards from your three opponents. Like gin rummy, you pick a tile from the wall, then discard one from your hand.

If a tile isn't immediately claimed, it's never again available for play. You can claim tiles from any opponent

to make a pong or kong, but only a tile discarded from the player on your left can be collected for a chow. You can also take tiles only if you have two of the three required tiles already in your hand. Scoring is complicated, and there are a number of special hands, but that's the game in brief.

*Hong Kong Mahjong Pro* is a lot of fun to play, and thanks to the excellent tutorial even beginners will soon be grabbing tiles with the best of them. Once you're ready to play a regular game, you can choose your opponents to match your own skill level.

It would be nice if you could take back a move, but that's not the game's major flaw. The problem is that you can't choose the tiles in your hand you want to use for a chow. If you have, for example, the 2, 3, 5, and 6 tiles, you need either a 1, 4, or 7 tile to complete a chow. But if you pick up a 4, the computer is likely to form a chow using the 3 and 5 tiles, wrecking your hand. It's the only frustrating feature in an otherwise well-done program.

—Leslie Mizell



## CASINO PACK 1 FOR WINDOWS

This Mindscape package (distributed by The Software Toolworks) doesn't claim to be a tutorial on how to beat the house. Each game — keno, blackjack, video poker, or roulette — comes with the basic rules, and that's about it. But it does bring four of the most popular casino games to your Windows environment, and that alone gives this package a lot of appeal.

Blackjack and video poker have the best interfaces of the lot. If you bet the same amount on every hand, all game functions can be performed with mouse clicks, without any need to use the menu bar until you're ready to quit.

Keno plays almost as smoothly, but of all four games it requires the least amount of strategy. There are 80 numbered balls, and you choose from 1 to 15 numbers. Twenty balls are then drawn, and your winnings are based on both how many numbers you selected and how many of your numbers were drawn. It's sort of like a lottery where you can lose if you bought too many tickets.

Roulette is a straightforward simulation of Las Vegas roulette (0 and 00 are on the wheel). The animation drags on a 386SX, and the rotation of



the wheel isn't re-created. It's sort of like a lottery where you can lose if you bought too many tickets.

There is an oddity in the installation instructions: you're told to check the disk to make sure all the necessary files



are present — it's almost like having the customer do the quality control work.

If you want to learn winning casino strategies, you'd do better to check out Villa Crespo's line of excellent gaming simulations. But *Casino Pack 1* is a great way to get a quick fix of gambling action inside Windows.

—Stephen Poole





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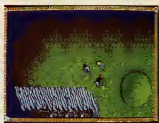
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## DELUXE SOLITAIRE



Forget the golf games and flight simulators — for pure, mindless game play on Windows, try *Deluxe Solitaire*.

Developed by the private company WinWare, *Deluxe Solitaire* offers 40 different solitaires, both luck games and strategy matches. The lineup ranges from the familiar Klondike, Golf, and Aces Up to the more unusual Thumb N Pouch, Good Measure, and Chameleon. Game play is practical; there are no frills, but you don't really need any in a straightforward card game.

Once you've selected your game and dealt the hand, you click and drag the cards from one stack to another. This can be awkward because you must drag slowly or the cards won't follow quickly enough. It's also easy to place cards on the wrong stack or foundation, but a click of the mouse button is all that's needed to reverse a blunder.

A flaw in *Deluxe Solitaire* is that the descriptions and rules are very brief, and you must scroll through all the

games to find out more about the one you're interested in playing. There's no automatic-play feature, either.

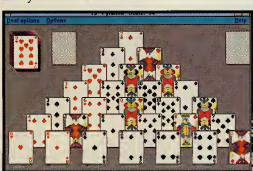
There are ten sets of card backs to choose from (the face cards are always the same), and although several are cheesy, there's a nice U.S.S. *Enterprise*

from *Star Trek* and a Christmas tree complete with lightly falling snow. You can design your own deck as well.

One warning to Windows 3.0 users: You may run into "ghosting" trouble, where several cards seem to be stuck together and are dealt as one no matter what game you're playing. The only thing to do is exit the game and reload. It's a problem with Windows, not *Deluxe Solitaire*, and it's been fixed in Windows 3.1.

*Deluxe Solitaire* isn't a card player's dream, but it's a solid game that's a lot of fun to play.

— Leslie Mizell



## THE LOST TREASURES OF INFOCOM

Remember when super VGA and 486 processor speeds existed only in your imagination? Or perhaps you recall, fondly or otherwise, those stomach-turning shades of cyan and magenta that graced the lower-than-low-res CGA screens of yesteryear. If you look back fondly on those days (or are intrigued by the lore passed on by PC veterans), we've got the game — well, actually 20 games — for you, priceless relics of the nascent days of PC gaming.

With *The Lost Treasures of Infocom*, from *Activision*, a score of classics is packed into one rather weighty box, just waiting to be discovered by a whole new legion of fans. Titles such as *Zork*, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and *Moonmist* are among the legends brought back to life after years of absence, and in a world where games almost play themselves, these old do-it-yourself/imagine-it-yourself creations may come as a shock to the uninitiated. It is, however, a pleasant shock.

You won't be bowled over by any technical innovations here. When PC graphics were little more than a joke, Infocom chose to concentrate on creating devilishly clever text adventures. Like a good book, these games are different things to different people. How you play a particular game depends much more on you than on the whims of a game designer, and therein lies the charm and entertainment of the Infocom stable.

As you play these games, though, you'll probably realize that they have much more in

common with their graphics-based descendants than you might have imagined. There still remains the major caveat of all adventure gaming, the necessity of looking everywhere and talking to everyone. And running a close second is the ever-popular admonition to "save often." Of course, lacking graphics, these games take a bit more concentration, because you must create all the scenes in your head.

With all the recent innovations in PC adventuring, it's easy to forget how relatively sophisticated these games are. The text parsers are amazingly good, and harder to trip up than some later, supposedly more advanced graphic adventures. Beyond that, *The Lost Treasures of Infocom* all share the



ability to hook you, so that you may end up playing far into the night.

If it's been a while since you played a "can't switch it off" game, perhaps you should consider your first trip, or maybe a return visit, to the Great Underground Empire, or mysterious Tresillian Castle. And don't worry about that funny headache — once you get your mental muscles back into shape after those years of neglect, it should go away.

— Gary Meredith

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## TRUMP CASTLE II — DELUXE EDITION

If you've never visited a big Las Vegas or Atlantic City casino, this Capstone release will give you some idea of what the experience would be like. Packed with digitized pictures and sounds from Trump Castle Casino Resort by the Bay in Atlantic City, New Jersey, *Trump Castle II* is almost a computerized brochure.

All those digitized screens embellish a straightforward casino gambling simulation. The game's core program provides for baccarat, blackjack, craps, roulette, video poker, and slots, and this deluxe version adds poker and nine moreslot machines. You begin the game in the grandiose main hall of Trump Castle, where you choose the game you'd like to play by clicking on a specific area of the screen. You can also click on two upper hallways, gaining access to more digitized screens of hotel rooms, suites, and even the nightclub and swimming pool. By clicking on various guests in these screens, you'll elicit responses ranging from "I love Trump Castle" to "This cross-your-heart bra is killing me."



The games themselves are something of a letdown after all those digitized shots. They're displayed in static, fairly colorless screens, although the game play is sound. Of the two new games that make this version Deluxe, Lots-O-Slots is probably the most entertaining. Poker is enjoy-



able enough if you're playing against a few friends, but the computer opponents can be maddening. They call every bet, whether they've got a realistic chance of winning or not. Bluffing is almost impossible, although the computer players' stubbornness does lead to some big pots.

*Trump Castle II — Deluxe Edition* is a competent, if uninspired, casino title. It doesn't really capture the feel of Atlantic City, but then few things in this world do.

— Matt Firme



## TROON NORTH

The strategy of the *Links* design team at Access is fairly simple: Put together an unbeatable array of well-known championship golf courses for its renowned golf simulation, infuse each with its own unique personality and peculiarities, and do so with uncanny realism and bedazzling graphics. And it's working: course disks for *Links* have been collecting awards with almost the same rapidity as they've been popping off store shelves.



The latest feather in *Links'* cap is *Troon North*, located in Arizona's Senorian desert just north of Scottsdale. The seventh in a series of add-on disks, *Troon North* is perhaps the least-known golf course simulated yet. Only in existence since March 1990, this minimalistic layout doesn't host a major PGA tour championship and, due to its location, isn't a popular vacation spot for golfers nationwide.

Planted in the middle of a desert, *Troon North* sometimes looks like a backdrop for one of the *Star Wars* movies. With the lean, rocky landscape and cloudless azure skies, *Troon* can at times be eerily alien. Course designers Jay Morrish and Tom Wieskopf, the latter a touring PGA pro,

wanted to isolate each hole from the rest and thereby create a thoroughly private golf experience. They've done that, and Access has been able to faithfully reproduce the intimacy.

Your biggest challenge on this course is the "Desert Rule," which states that "if a ball comes to rest in the desert, the player may drop a ball within two club lengths of the nearest point of grass relief...with a one-stroke penalty." Keeping

the ball in play is priority one, but if you can do it *Troon North* can be a breeze. From the blue tees, it's rated just 71.5. Of course, keeping the ball in play means executing accurate shots and not trying to kill the ball off the tee. Sharp slices and hooks should be avoided at all costs.

With *Troon North* in the lineup, *Links* players now have quite a collection of courses to play. Featured in at least one course disk each are the Pacific Ocean; Utah's Wasatch Mountains; Austin, Texas' Barton Creek; the plentiful pine trees of Pinehurst, N.C.; and now an Arizona desert.

— Brian Carroll





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# TEE TIME!

## THE NEW GENERATION OF PC GOLF

Computer linksters have a lot to smile about. The golf simulations released in the past few years were award-winners and sales leaders, but now a new slate of bigger and better games is hitting the market.

The range of new golf sims offers the broadest array of features and play styles ever available. Whatever your preference — DOS or Windows, graphic realism or stylized renderings, detailed control or fast tournament play, digitized courses or design-it-yourself greens — this new batch of golf titles can serve it up.

The menu of new releases is marked by a number of firsts. Access Software is upping the ante with *Links 386 Pro*, the first entertainment title requiring a PC equipped with a 80386 microprocessor and Super VGA display. *Microsoft Golf for Windows* is the software giant's first golf title, and it marks the most significant entry by Microsoft into the

consumer entertainment market since the best-selling *Flight Simulator* a decade ago. Microsoft, who intends to step up

its PC sim software line, worked out a deal with Access to bring an enhanced version of the much-heralded *Links* to Windows. Jack

Nicklaus *Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition* is Accolade's highly polished state-of-the-art version (256-color VGA) of its popular golf sim with course architect. Electronic Arts is making its first foray into Windows-based entertainment with an upgraded, enhanced *PGA Tour Golf*. And MicroProse is poised to release *Greens*, the company's first venture into the golf sim arena.

Each of these titles offers a unique approach to PC golf, and, as you'll see, the distinctive style of play, interface, and graphics make each one easily distinguishable from the others. Whatever your golf fancy, there's a lot to make you happy.







## LINKS 386 PRO

For sheer, unadulterated realism, no golf simulation equals the performance of *Links 386 Pro*. It doesn't have a course designer, nor does it let you compete vicariously against the world's best golfers. But no other game succeeds as much as *Links 386 Pro* at duplicating the experience of heading out to the course and playing a round, either alone or with friends.



The original incarnation of *Links* was a breakthrough in golf games. With its digitized graphics, RealSound effects, and unheard of control over factors such as stance, club facing, and swing plane, *Links* set a new standard. Now comes *Links 386 Pro*, and it's a PC duffer's dream come true. Almost every wished-for feature absent from *Links* has been incorporated into *386 Pro*, and the result is a tour-de-force in graphics, playability, and realism.

There's a price to pay for a simulation this ambitious, however, and it's reflected in the title itself. 286 owners shouldn't worry about paying the green fees to tee off with *386 Pro*; only players with 386 systems or better need apply. It takes considerable computing power to draw the game's high-res (640 x 400) Super VGA graphics (this is, to the best of our knowledge, the first SVGA-only release) within a reasonable waiting period, and *386 Pro* will gladly utilize up to 8 MB of RAM to speed up the process.



But thanks to an assortment of graphics options, a user with 6, 4, or as little as 2 MB of memory can play *386 Pro* without having to endure interminable delays between shots. You can compress, to varying degrees, all the game's bitmapped images, as well as decrease the resolution on distant objects, and the resulting graphics — though certainly not as jaw-dropping as those at the highest detail and resolution — are more than good enough to get you ready for another round. And if you don't feel like fiddling about

with the settings, the program will automatically determine the settings for your machine to provide the best compromise of looks and playability.

The preview version which we played extensively came with the Barton Creek Course, in Texas, but the version to hit store shelves will feature the Harbor Town course, in Hilton Head, South Carolina. We've never played Harbor Town, but if it's as challenging as Barton Creek, PC golfers are in for a real treat. The



unforgiving slopes, numerous water traps, and gorgeous scenery make Barton Creek a real gem, and Access informs us that it will be one of the first add-on course disks available for *386 Pro*.

Owners of the original *Links* will be pleased to learn that a *386 Pro* will come with a course converter, making it backwards-compatible with all the *Links* course disks. The older courses won't look quite as nice as Harbor Town or Barton Creek (there are plans, however, to completely convert the old course disks to SVGA format), they're still incredibly handsome, and will afford *386 Pro* buyers quite a selection of add-on courses right off the bat.

The new features are extensive, and one glance at them makes it obvious that many were requested by *Links* owners. *386 Pro* includes options to play as a male or female golfer; choice of shirt color; a profile showing the slope from ball to pin, anywhere on the course; a "flag zoom," which brings the flag zooming in a straight

line from cup to tee (especially useful on wicked doglegs); a save-shot function, so you can prove to your friends you really *did* hit that hole-in-one; a top-down view (zoomable and scrollable) of each hole, whether or not you're currently playing that hole; and two features that deserve special mention: the "record" function, and the multiple viewing modes.

The record function is simple to use, and gives *386 Pro* unlimited playability. No longer do you need to have another person present in order to compete against a human opponent. Just hit Record before you start a round, save your game, copy your saved-game file to a floppy disk, then give the disk to a friend. By copying the saved-game file to his *386 Pro* directory, he can play against you, seeing all the clubs you selected and shots you took. And if he chooses to record *that* game, he could pass it along to someone else, who could then compete against both of your rounds.

*386 Pro* has the greatest number of viewing modes of any game around. In addition to the regular view, top-down view, and profile we mentioned earlier, there are windows for a small normal view, large and small green views, a scorecard, and setup (stance, club facing, and swing plane). You can split the monitor into as many as four windows, then choose which views you'd like to see. Our favorite configuration has half the screen showing the normal view from behind the golfer, a quarter of the screen showing the view from the pin, and the other quarter displaying the adjustable top-down view. The possibilities are endless, and you can switch views at any time with a point and click.

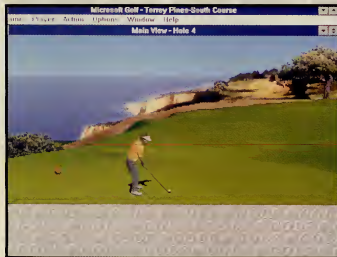
If you're serious about golf simulations, treat yourself to *Links 386 Pro*. And if you don't own a 386 to run it on, you've finally got a real good reason to lay out the money for an upgrade.

— Stephen Poole



## MICROSOFT GOLF FOR WINDOWS

Spend a lot of time in Windows? You'll want to check out *Microsoft Golf*, a brand-new package that's essentially an enhanced version of *Links*, Access Software's golf classic.



Those familiar with *Links* will be able to jump right in and play — the interface, digitized golfer and course, swing meter, and so on, is all here. Yet *Microsoft Golf* is far from a quick-and-dirty Windows version of *Links*. Microsoft engineered *Golf* to incorporate all appropriate Windows features so that the simulation is very well-behaved. You can jump in and out of the game efficiently while working with other programs. The screen is



user-sizable, and an especially nice feature is the placement of the game-screen components in "daughter" windows — you can move the control panel, swing meter, main view, and top view wherever you want.

Most of the graphics have been enhanced to support 640 X 480 resolution. You can choose between a male or female golfer, and there's new sound in this version. In fact, the sound recordings are in .WAV files (standard Windows sound format), which you can modify or replace if you have a sound card with a Windows driver.

Other new features include a caddy — he'll choose the most appropriate club for the situation if you toggle this option on — and "Gimmie," for those who get close to the pin but wish to forego the putt and move on to the next hole.

*Microsoft Golf* comes bundled with San Diego's Torrey Pines Course, and is compatible with all the *Links* course disks designed for DOS. Access informs us that they'll be following *Links Pro 386* with Super VGA versions of all courses in the months ahead, and these will also be compatible with *Microsoft Golf*.

— Lance Elko



## JACK NICKLAUS GOLF & COURSE DESIGN: SIGNATURE EDITION

One of the hallmarks of Jack Nicklaus' splendid career has been his unprecedented ability to rise to the occasion and meet a challenge. Once dubbed "Golfer of the Century," the Golden Bear



loves a good fight. This enduring competitiveness might in some measure explain his most recent golf simulation, *Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition*. Probably feeling the heat from and a few impressive rivals, Jack and the Accolade design team



went back to the drawing board.

Their revisions have yielded vast improvements on what was already a fine golf game, *Jack Nicklaus Unlimited Golf and Course Design*. The newer *Signature Edition* takes full advantage of the game's 256-

color palette and digitized graphics without sacrificing any of the previous game's wonderful playability.

What sets this golf simulation apart from the others, though, is its remarkable course design feature, which gives you the opportunity to create the course of your dreams. Following a simple set of instructions, you can create your ideal course either from scratch or by editing one of the game's two existing courses. And talk about instant gratification — as soon as you complete a hole, the game gives you the option of playing it from any point, tee to pin. If the



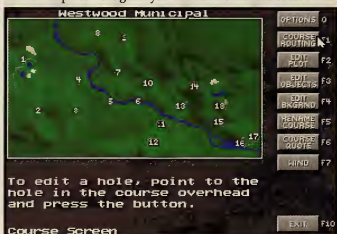
hole isn't up to snuff, head back to the program and do as much editing as you'd like.

The design option gives this game another, more subtle advantage over the competition (at least until Access comes out with its own course design disk for *Links*). By giving you total creative freedom, *Jack Nicklaus* insures longevity of interest among its players. There is virtually no limit to what you can do. Everything from the number and types of trees to the location of the cart paths and direction of the wind are completely up to you. Should your own creations begin to seem stale, you can always swap course designs with a friend.

If piecing together an entire 18-hole course seems daunting, begin by editing one of the courses included in the game. This is a great way to get accustomed to the layout options while you pick up some ideas for your own masterpiece. And if you're ever in doubt, refer back to the sprawling, 125-page player's guide. More than just a road map for your design, this document lays out a helpful synopsis of Nicklaus' own philosophy for building courses. And he ought to know: the six-time Masters winner has put together 185 championship courses that span the globe.

One more note on the guidebook: it actually makes for a fairly decent read. Tips from Jack, facts about the history of the sport, and plenty of basic golf instruction are sprinkled throughout, making it much more than an instruction manual.

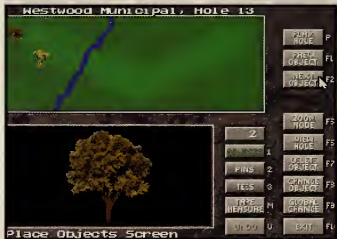
As for game play, this latest edition packs few surprises. If you've played any previous *Jack Nicklaus* games, you'll immediately recognize the interface. The swing meter, which is displayed in the form of a segmented bar, has been moved, however, from the left side of the viewing screen to below it. The new, horizontal placement gives you a fuller view of the course.



The two courses that come with the package are the English Turn Golf Club of New Orleans and the Sherwood Country Club of Thousand Oaks, California. Not surprisingly, both are Nicklaus designs.

English Turn, which played host in April to the Freeport-McMoran Classic, is not for landlubbers. This large (7,100 yards) course was carved out of the Louisiana landscape following a bend in the Mississippi River. That means you'll have to contend with water hazards on each and every hole — and these aren't guppy ponds, either.

Sherwood Country Club is a more recent Nicklaus design and a bit less taxing than English Turn. Because of its location in the foothills of Southern California, there are several waterfalls toward the middle of the course and rock-lined pools at the lower elevations. That makes for both pretty scenery and potentially costly mistakes.







Besides your purchase price, the cost of the *Signature Edition's* graphic mastery is playing time. If you have a 386SX running at 16 Mhz, you'll have to wait patiently as the lush scenery is redrawn. It's rather a small sacrifice, though; you can still finish up an NBA game in about 40 minutes.

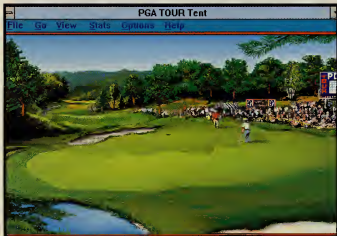
To get the most out of the package, a mouse is strongly recommended, particularly for the course design option. To design your course quickly and accurately, the snappy response of a mouse is far superior to a joystick or keyboard. All major sound boards are supported, and either VGA or MCGA is required.

— Brian Carroll



## PGA TOUR GOLF FOR WINDOWS

When you were a kid, you probably dreamed of catching the winning touchdown pass in the Super Bowl, pitching a perfect game for your favorite baseball team, or hitting the game-winning shot in an NBA championship game. But as you grew up and



realized that those things just weren't going to happen, they slowly slipped from your mind.

Unless you're a golfer. Every hacker dreams of taking on the big-money pros and showing them how it's done. Maybe it's because golf, unlike football or basketball, is a game that you can play competitively almost your whole life. Or perhaps it's because so many golfers grew up watching tournaments every week on television, and when the pros make it look simple, it's easy to think that maybe you could do it too....



And that's where *PGA TOUR Golf for Windows* comes into the picture. It's the only golf simulation on the market licensed by the PGA Tour, and the only one which lets you go up against 60 of the Tour's best. Better yet, it brings you the action in a format that all

golf fans are familiar with—the televised tournament. An announcer appears onscreen to give you information on how far your last shot traveled, as well as report on how the rest of the field is doing. The game's "hole browser" makes you the cameraman, giving you the chance to look at the hole from tee to cup from multiple angles. And instant replays can be accessed after any shot.

After using the driving range and practice greens to get warmed up, you can choose to play on any of four courses, three of which are detailed simulations of some famous stops on the PGA Tour: PGA West, Tournament Players' Club (TPC) at Avenel (site of the Kemper Open), and TPC at Sawgrass (home of the Players' Championship). Each course has a unique feel and personality, though all three share one thing in common: they're extremely challenging. After you've failed to make the first day's cut in several tournaments, you'll understand and appreciate the level of play the pros have achieved.

The interface in *PGA TOUR Golf* is easily mastered—in keeping with its new home, every necessary action can be performed



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STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS, INC.®



PGA West Stadium - Hole 5 533 Yards, Par 5					
ESN LEADERBOARD ESN					
Electronic Arts Sports Network					
	Par	Hole		Par	Hole
41. Joey Sindelar	E	17	51. Roger Maltbie	+2	10
42. Dan Pohl	E	18	52. Bobby Wadkins	+2	12
43. Tommy Armour III	+1	6	53. Fuzzy Zoeller	+2	15
44. Bruce Lietzke	+1	8	54. Lou Hinkle	+2	17
45. David Frost	+1	10	55. Phil Blackmar	+2	18
46. Loren Roberts	+1	13	56. Howard Twitty	+3	14
47. Larry Rinker	+1	16	57. Mike Hulbert	+3	--
48. Mike Reid	+1	16	58. J. C. Snead	+3	--
49. Tom Purtzer	+2	7	59. Wayne Grady	+4	11
50. Ed Fiori	+2	8	60. Raynor Deathblow	+5	--

Prev Next OK



with a mouse. The manual includes an extensive list of "shortcut" keystrokes, but probably the only time you'll touch the keys are to type in the name of a saved player.

All shots are handled with a standard power meter: one click of the mouse (or tap of the space bar) begins your backswing, a second click ends it and determines the strength of your shot, and a third determines whether you hit a hook, slice, or straight shot. Before putting, a highly detailed 3D view of the green is displayed, revealing all the breaks and slopes between you and the cup. It's unlike any other golf simulation, and it may take newcomers a while to learn how to fully utilize the information it presents. But once you're familiar with it, you can find yourself making some incredibly long putts—and feeling pretty satisfied with yourself for reading the green correctly.

*PGA Tour Golf* was a huge success for Electronic Arts when it first appeared for PCs a couple of years back (in fact, it was voted *Game Players* top PC sports game for 1990), but the game had one flaw: its 16-color graphics lagged far behind its playability. Electronic Arts has remedied that with rich, high-res 256-color graphics for the Windows version, and as a result *PGA Tour Golf* looks better now than it ever has. True, the bright colors give the game a slightly cartoonish look, but the enhanced graphics are still light years ahead of those in the original.

You can run *PGA Tour Golf* on a 286, but if you do, expect a lot of downtime between shots. For best results, you need at least a 386DX/20, and 4 MB of RAM. Playability is sacrificed on a slower machine, and that would do *PGA Tour Golf* a disservice: it's one of the most comfortably playable golf sims around.

—Stephen Poole



## GREENS

Coming this fall from MicroProse is *Greens*. Originally announced for release in the early spring, this simulation had a disappointing, sub-par appearance at last January's CES. The version shown to the press at Summer CES was far more impressive.



MicroProse apparently went back to the drawing board—judging from our somewhat brief look, they've come up with a much more attractive and much better-playing golf game. (Compare the accompanying screens with the sample we ran two issues ago.) The simulation's play parameters will likely be the same as announced by MicroProse in January—*Greens* will have six different courses, ten game types, a full handicap system, and individual player profiles.

If you're playing solo, you can go up against as many as eight computer golfers, each with customizable play styles. Game types include singles, 18-, 36-, and 72-hole tournaments. You can also go head-to-head with a friend, and play at a novice or handicapped level, with a right- or left-handed computer golfer.

—Lance Elko

GP

# Earth has had 2 World Wars. You can have 4 billion.

**Introducing Global CONQUEST.™** The classic strategy engagement that's never the same game twice.

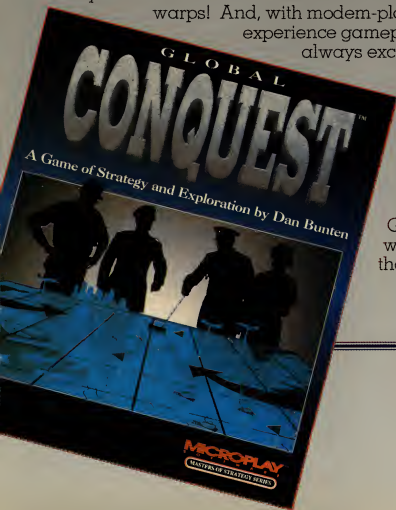
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Actual screens may vary.



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# Software EXTRAVAGANZA

A REPORT FROM THE SUMMER CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

LANCE ELKO

Twice a year, after every CES, we return excited by all the great new products we've seen. This June was no exception. The 100-plus new titles, spanning all categories, clearly demonstrate the continued ascent of entertainment software into the higher end of PC hardware technology. Owners of XT's and AT's might be a bit disgruntled at this trend, but 386 and 486 owners will soon have more outstanding titles to choose from than ever before.

Other trends we noticed at this show: more disks per package; more titles moving to CD-ROM (not necessarily to the MPC standard), most of which are enhanced versions of popular disk-based titles; more — and better — sound cards on the way (we'll be following this up with a feature this fall); and an increasing number of educational programs, which are starting to catch up to pure entertainment titles in graphics, sound, and interface.

Here's a publisher-by-publisher breakdown that covers what we'll be seeing this fall and winter.

Access: *Links 386 Pro* is a prime example of the trend toward developing games specifically for higher-end PCs. This golf simulation is the first entertainment title that requires a 386 with Super VGA. And, yes, it's really good looking — you can see for yourself in "Tee Time!" elsewhere in this issue.

Accolade: *Road & Truck Presents Grand Prix Unlimited* (to be reviewed next issue) and *Snoopy's Game Club* (reviewed this issue) were on display, and both titles are currently available. Arriving in late summer/early fall will be *Star Control II*, a much larger and more intricate game than its predecessor, and *Summer Challenge*, Accolade's Olympic counterpart to *Winter Challenge*. *Summer Challenge*, which accommodates up to ten human players, features pole-vaulting, the high jump, javelin, 400-meter hurdles, cycling, kayaking, equestrian competition, and archery. *Summer Challenge* was developed by MindSpan, the designers of *Winter Challenge*.

Activision: Besides ex-

hibiting the recently released *Sargon V*, *Leather Goddesses of Phobos II*, and *The Lost Treasures of Infocom*, Activision announced an agreement with noted artist Rodney Alan Greenblatt to develop and publish *Rodney's Funscreen*, a five-game educational product for children ages 3-8. Also announced was a second volume of *The Lost Treasures of Infocom*, which should be available shortly. Activision also noted that they were developing graphic-based sequels to several popular Infocom text adventures from the early and middle 1980s.

ASCIIware: *SpellCraft: Aspects of Valor*, ASCIIware's first PC title, should be available this fall. This full-blown fantasy role-player was originally announced at January CES. It's a big game — up to 100 hours of game play — and has very beautiful, richly detailed

graphics. Another new title announced by ASCIIware was *Dominus*, a hybrid game that combines fantasy role-play, action, and war strategy. This, too, is a behemoth — it includes 72 different territories to rule and defend, and offers 80-100 hours of game time. *Dominus* is expected to be available in October.

Buena Vista: This label, an



Dog Eat Dog

offshoot of Disney Software, showed the latest version of *Heaven and Earth*. Subtitled *A Dazzling Journey for the Mind*, it offers three different game segments, and can best be described as an abstract,





Unnatural Selection

meditative "game." It has a gorgeous look, and should be available shortly.

On the other end of the spectrum, *Dog Eat Dog: An Adventure in Office Politics* is a hilarious spoof on interpersonal relationships in the work place. Using a neural network model, the program studies your responses to people and events, and the game evolves accordingly. Look for it in the late fall. In *Unnatural Selection*, players create, breed, and mutate fierce genetic warriors who then march off to a do-or-die battle. This title is in early development and won't be ready until spring '93.

Capstone: Capstone announced four new titles, each with a TV or movie license. They



An American Tail

include *An American Tail—The Computer Adventures of Fievel and His Friends*, an adventure with puzzles and games, targeted to the younger set; *The Dark Half*, a graphic adventure adapted from a Stephen King story for Orion Pictures; *L.A. Law—The Computer Game*, a strategy game based on the popular TV series; and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, an adventure/arcade title based on the upcoming film this fall.

*An American Tail* and *The Dark Half* should be available by now, *L.A. Law* is due out in

September, and *Home Alone 2* is expected to be on shelves in October.

Davidson: This educational software publisher debuted *Davidson's Zoo Keeper*, a learning adventure designed for children ages 6-11. The game, which puts the player in the role of a zoo keeper, teaches about animals and their habitats, with an emphasis on working to save endangered species. Many of the game screens feature clear, digitized photos of animals. *Zoo Keeper* should be on store shelves shortly after this issue reaches newsstands.

Also announced by Davidson was *Reading Adventures in Oz*, a reading-skill development program based on Frank Baum's *Oz* book series. It's targeted to ages 4-9, and is scheduled for release in October. A Windows version of the award-winning *New Math Blaster Plus* was previewed by Davidson, and should be available now.



The Dark Half

ZugWare, a line of learning titles developed by First Byte and distributed by Davidson, announced *Zug's Race Through Space* (for ages 5-12) and *Zug's*

*Dinosaur World* (for ages 3-8) for release in August. These games follow the first two titles in the Zug series, *Zug's Adventures on Eco-Island* (originally released as *Eco-Saurus*) and *Zug's*



Davidson's Zoo Keeper

*Spelling Adventures* (previously *Spell-A-Saurus*).

D.C. True: New publisher D.C. True announced its first product, *Shadow President: The Simulation of Presidential World Power*. The simulation is based on seven years of Tufts University doctoral research, and it incorporates CIA World Factbook data in modeling global responses to your decisions as president.

The simulation begins on June 1, 1990, when the Berlin Wall is falling and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has not yet taken place. World exploration offers 150 countries, and the CIA Factbook provides more than 600 pages of detailed information on these nations. After spending time in research, you make decisions, set an agenda, and watch the world and the U.S. react to your policies. One of your goals is to win re-election as U.S. president. D.C. True noted that *Shadow President* should be available in mid-summer.



Shadow President

↑ **Disney Software:** Announced last year, *Stunt Island* has now been delayed until September. From the detailed preview we were given, it looks like the delay was well worth it. *Stunt Island* is a much bigger and better program, with a seemingly endless number of flying tricks you can perform and record. It has a "studio control" feel with a huge number of options for customization. Coaster, the design-it-and-ride-it roller-coaster simulation, has been moved ahead to a November release date.

Also coming this fall are Disney's *Aladdin Print Kit*, timed for release with the Disney feature film, and enhanced versions of *Mickey's ABC's*, *Mickey's 123's*, and *Mickey's Colors and Shapes*. These three titles were released more than a year ago, and the new editions promise to incorporate 256-color VGA graphics, support for all popular sound cards, and a new install program.

↑ **Domark:** This London-based publisher, whose games are distributed in the U.S. by Accolade, announced several new titles. In *Nam: 1965-1975*, you play two roles. As Commander-in-Chief of the military, you control all strategic decisions in your effort to prevent South Vietnam from falling to Communist aggression. On the home front, you oppose all challenges to the South Vietnamese government, and must deal with economic and military support for South Vietnam while keeping an eye on your popularity ratings. The simulation includes a Tet Offensive scenario as well as Johnson and Nixon campaign scenarios. *Nam* is due out this fall.

Also new from Domark are *Shadowlands*, an FRP employing Photoscape, a new lighting system — which realistically illuminates the

game landscape as you play; *Campaign: A Strategic Flight Simulation*, based on the Russian Mig-29M Super-Fulcrum; *Cruise for a Corpse*, a high-seas murder mystery set in 1926; *Super Space Invaders*, a new, added-feature version of the 13-year-old arcade classic; and *Tengen's Arcade Hits*, a bundle of five coin-op classics — *Hard Drivin' II*, *A.P.B.*, *Klax*, *Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters*, and *Toobin*. *Shadowlands* is due out in the fall, while *Campaign*, *Cruise for a Corpse*, *Super Space Invaders* and *Tengen's Arcade Hits* should be available now.



Front Page Sports: Football

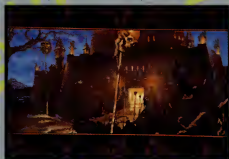
↑ **Dynamix:** On display was the long-awaited *Aces of the Pacific* (look for complete coverage next issue). On the heels of its success with the award-winning *Red Baron* and the positive early response to *Aces of the Pacific*, Dynamix announced the launch of its Great War Planes series. Look for *Aces Over Europe* in November, as well as several upcoming expansion disks, including *Red Baron Mission Builder*, *RAF in the Pacific*, and *WWII: 1946!* The latter two are designed for use with *Aces of the Pacific*.

Behind closed doors, Dynamix was showing *Front Page Sports: Football*, the first title in their new line of sports simulations. The Dynamix folks, quite elated over this product, were disappointed when the PC used for demo purposes failed to deliver. Also unveiled was Dynamix' first FRP, *The Betrayal at Kronidor*, based on Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar* novels. Both *Football* and *Kronidor* are expected out this fall.

↑ **Electronic Arts:** This software giant, now producing titles for nearly every game platform, had ten new PC titles on display — and they're all coming in the last half of '92!

Four new EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) titles were shown at CES: *Michael Jordan in Flight*, *John Madden Football II*, *Team USA Basketball*, and *PGA Tour Golf for Windows*. *Jordan*, expected this fall, is a unique and visually stunning basketball sim that employs digitized video and appears to have full-motion video. Players control *Jordan* in 3-on-3, 1-on-1, or 3-point shootouts. *Madden II*, planned for release around the start of football season, is for strategy buffs rather than those interested in arcade play or NFL-based simulation. *Madden* gives play-by-play analysis on every down as well as advice on play selection. *Madden II* has 28 teams, each with full rosters.

*Team USA Basketball* is designated by EA as a special "Collector's Edition" simulation of the Olympic All-Star team. The game features 12 international teams, each with actual players from the '92 Summer Olympic squads. All games are played by international rules. *Team USA* is expected to ship in August, and will be available only through December 31, 1992. For more



Betrayal at Kronidor

on *PGA Tour Golf for Windows*, see "Tee Time," elsewhere in this issue.

EA also showed a number of other new titles. *Car and Driver* is a driving sim based on ten of *Car and Driver* magazine's all-time favorite performance automobiles. Ten roadways and courses are included. In *The Lost*





Files of *Sherlock Holmes*, the player, as Holmes, tackles the Case of the Serrated Scalpel. This game, which is huge (25 megs of hard-drive space!), has a terrific look and soundtrack, and is quite evocative of Victorian England. Both *Carand Driver* and *Sherlock Holmes* are due out this fall.



Michael Jordan in Flight



The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes

The long-delayed *PowerMonger* (it was first announced more than a year ago) should be out this summer. Also available this summer will be *Populous II*, a game set in ancient Greece. As a follow-up product to the groundbreaking *Populous*, it features 30 new animated powers and includes a cast of legendary Greek deities, such as Poseidon, Zeus, and Apollo. The major challenge in *Populous II* is to defeat 32 of the most powerful Greek deities in battle.

*Birds of Prey*, which should be shipping very shortly, is a flight sim that features 40 different modern planes ranging from the Mig-29 to the F117A Stealth Fighter. The sim offers 12 mission types, and is flown in a real-time environment.

**GameTek:** The first installment in GameTek's huge FRP trilogy, *Daemonsgate*, will be shipping shortly. *Daemonsgate I: Dorovon's Key* debuted at CES last January. GameTek tells us that the initial installment was three years in development

and required the talents of more than 40 programmers and artists.

*Humans*, a light-hearted adventure game with a Stone Age setting, should be on shelves by now, and *Gadgets*, a two-player side-scrolling action-adventure game, will ship in October. New entries from the GameTek/Fisher-Price alliance are the *Fisher-Price Picture Dictionary* (available now) and the *Fisher-Price Creativity Kits*. The latter is a new series — the first two titles, *Farmhouse* and *Main Street*, should be shipping now.

**Interplay:** Three new game titles from Interplay will ship later this year. *Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space*, which was announced early this year, has moved from a spring release to fall. *Castles II: Siege and Conquest*, due this fall, is a follow-up to *Castles*, but features a completely new game system and loads of new features — an ability to attack or defend, different story lines based on which personality you play, multiple computer players, and digitized movie footage.

*Battle Chess 4000* (another ambitious title that asks for 25 MB of hard drive space) is the latest offering in the popular animated chess series. With a futuristic setting, 4000 features a translucent chess board. The game pieces are digitized renderings of clay models, and the animated moves are designed to evoke a few laughs. Interplay plans to have a spe-



Battle Chess 4000

cial SVGA (640 x 480) version available, too. The games should be out by Christmas. Also announced was the *Classic 5*, a bundling of backgammon, chess, checkers, Go, and Bridge. It's due out later this summer.

**Interstel:** Look for *Control of the Seas*, a World War II naval strategy simulation set in the South Pacific, in November. The game, designed to be historically accurate, offers multiple scenarios and an option for modem play. Also planned for release around the same time is *DarkStar*, a mega-sized space-combat simulator that plays in real time. The game features 30 different races and 617 planets, each of which is unique and can be explored. *DarkStar* seems to be a true labor of love that strategy and tactics fans could find very appealing.

**Konami:** One of the more innovative titles at the show was *NFL Video Master Football*. This game, due out this fall, splices

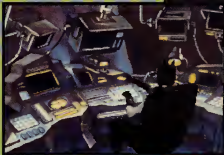
All through Bretagne and Europe, local lords gathered their forces to stake claim



Castles II

segments — on the fly — from hundreds of actual clips from the NFL Films video library to show you the results of your play calling. You select from 13 formations and more than 150 plays, and you can control all 28 NFL teams simultaneously. If you're ambitious, you can create and control your own NFL, managing one or as many teams as you wish through a complete season. (*NFL Video Master* is being developed by Park Place Productions — see *Spirit of Discovery*, later in this story).

Another brand-new title announced by Konami was *Batman Returns*. Based on the



Batman Returns

recently released film, this role-playing adventure has terrific graphics (VGA only) and animation that runs very smoothly on a 386SX/16. You guide Batman through Gotham City looking for clues, fighting the Penguin and his cronies, interrogating enemies, and so on.

A new title developed by the Bitmap Brothers, *Magic Pockets*, is an action-arcade game with 30 stages. *Magic Pockets* is reminiscent of some of the more popular videogame titles that feature huge worlds to explore and lots of enemy bosses to defeat. It should be available this summer.

The long-awaited *Champions* should be available in the fall, and, yes, it looks like it may well be a top-notch product. Two other previously announced Konami titles, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and *Utopia* should arrive this summer.

Plan 9 from Outer Space

For more titles to be distributed by Konami, see *Spirit of Discovery* elsewhere in this article.

■ **The Learning Company:** Their latest offering is *Ready for Letters*, a game for ages three to five. *Letters* features six different activities designed to develop important pre-reading skills, and includes digitized speech for feedback. The package is available now.

■ **Legend Entertainment:** The popular *Spellcasting* series will continue this fall with *Spellcasting 301: Spring Break*. With tongue firmly in cheek, designer Steve Meretzky moves Ernie Eaglebeak to Fort Naughtytail for some fun in the sun. Due out later in the fall is *Eric the Unready* from Legend's head dude, Bob Bates. *Eric* is a bawdy adventure spoof with a medieval theme.

■ **LucasArts Entertainment:** *X-Wing*, based on the Star Wars fantasy, is a space-combat game in which you are placed in the cockpit of a Rebel Alliance starfighter to battle waves of Darth Vader's Imperial fighters and Star Destroyers. *X-Wing* is



X-Wing

slated for December release.

■ **Maxis:** Described by Maxis as "software toys," *El-fish* and *SimLife* debuted at CES. These products, particularly *El-fish*, drew the attention of the CNN News cameras during the show. Developed in Moscow by AnimaTek, a team of mathematicians and physicists led by Vladimir Pokhilko and Tetris-creator Alexey Pajitnov, *El-fish* lets players create aquariums on their PC screen. Sound silly? It impressed the CNN folks, and it will impress you. *El-fish* uses a new graphics rendering technology that creates realistic fish and plants that appear to be fully three-dimensional. What's more, each fish has a genetic code that controls its appearance and behavior. Users can cross-breed fish to create new species—then leave them to their fate. They could dominate, end up floating on the surface, or become food for more aggressive fish.

We did a double-take at first sight, and not just because *El-fish* is graphically stunning—someone had placed a digitized image of Barbie in full wedding dress in the tank. The bride-to-be Barbie smiled serenely out from the tank as fish swam in front of, behind, and all around her.

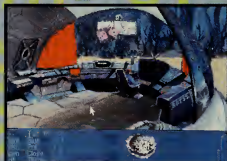
*SimLife* is a genetic-engineering simulation that features artificial-life technology in the form of plants and animals. The user can insert mutagens (to form mutations, hence evolution), or alter the genetics of an existing creature to see what long-term effects might occur. Look for both Maxis titles late in the year.

■ **MECC:** This educational publisher is moving deeper into the home market with four new titles slated for fall release. *Hero*

by Night is an action-adventure with a unique, cartoony look. *Hero* (for ages 10 to adult) is a crime-solving game that is intended to hone deductive skills. The player's role is to collect clues during the day and follow up on leads by night in hopes of thwarting Mr. Big, a power-hungry criminal. *Storybook Weaver* is a truly charming writing program (for ages 6-12) that's packed with hundreds of scenes, images, and borders for story illustration.

For the younger set (ages 3-6), *SnapDragon* offers an open-ended environment in which a child can explore freely. The intent is to encourage development of classification and grouping skills. Also coming from MECC is *USA GeoGraph*, a "living" map that's tied to a 120-category database with information on the 50 states and 5 territories, plus D.C. It's targeted to ages ten and older.

■ **MicroProse:** If this



Rex Nebula



Task Force 1942

company wanted to rename itself, we'd suggest MicroProlific. They have a big '92 lineup. *Darklands*, the company's debut FRP title announced last year, should be out by the time you read this, as should *World Circuit*, a Grand Prix racing sim. We had a good look at MicroProse's first graphic adventure, now officially

You stumbled back to your office after a long day of detective work. But before you can get cozy with a whiskey bottle, there's a message waiting on the phone machine.

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Donna is missing!!  
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#### System requirements:

286 or faster machine  
with 640K RAM;  
hard disk with min.  
8 megabytes of available space required, mouse recommended).

compatible with EGA, MCGA and VGA (VGA highly recommended).  
**Sound support:** Sound Blaster Pro, Adlib Gold



RATED R (This program is voluntarily rated due to the partially violent and adult nature of the graphic imagery). This program is intended for mature audiences only!!! No sales to minor under 18 and where prohibited by law.

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dubbed *Rex Nebular* and the *Cosmic Gender Bender*. Rex, the game's futuristic hero, is an interstellar adventurer and notorious womanizer who's after a priceless vase. The game is full of humor, and its digitized hand-painted graphics and convincing animation were impressive. Rex should be available in October.

Two releases due out very shortly are *A.T.A.C.*, a combat adventure set in the year 2001, in which the player leads a task force against a super powerful drug cartel, and *B-17 Flying Fortress*, a simulation of the *Memphis Belle* during its missions over occupied Europe. The player selects and oversees ten crew members, and can fly up to 25 different missions.

Another pair of releases is scheduled to ship in October. *Task Force 1942* is the first title in MicroProse's World War II Pacific Theater simulation series. In 1942, the player commands and operates a task force of destroyers, cruisers, and battleships in a recreation of the Solomon Campaign. *F-15 Strike Eagle III* continues the Strike Eagle series with a new look that blends 3-D polygon and bitmapped graphics — the result is more realistic flying and dogfighting action. A campaign mode and a two-player head-to-head combat mode are featured.

For more details on MicroProse's first golf sim, see "Tee Time!" elsewhere in this issue.

**Mindcraft:** *Siege*, a real-time strategy game with a Medieval theme, should be available now. Two other strategy role-players were announced. *Legions of Krell* is an advanced space strategy sim in which the player commands more than 100 legions of battle-ready Krellan warriors. *Mercenaries* puts the player in the role of a recent Marine Academy graduate who is recruited by a powerful ex-general to join a secret band of

mercenaries. The game is a futuristic strategy affair with a large variety of covert missions.

**New World Computing:** Due out any day now, *Might &*



F-15 Strike Eagle III

*Magic: Clouds of Xeen* is set in the tradition of the *Might & Magic* series, but presents a brand new world, more detailed than those in the earlier titles. The game includes auto-mapping and an automatic quest/message keeper to eliminate the need to jot notes by hand.

**Origin:** Chris Roberts is hard at task on *Strike Commander*. When you see the game this fall, you'll know why it has slipped nearly a year. The stunning graphics and animation sequences looked like nothing we had seen before. *Strike Commander* is not an extension of the *Wing Commander* group — in fact, it's a technological leap beyond. The new technology, trademarked as *RealSpace by Origin*, involves 3-D real-time bitmapped images, fractal graphics, and texture mapping. We don't know too many specifics about game play at this point, but if *Strike Commander* plays anything like it looks....

**Paragon:** *Mantis*: XF5700 *Experimental Space Fighter* is due any day now. It's a very ambitious title, the first from the new Paragon Studios, the company's production house. *Mantis* is an enormous game — it features more than five megabytes of digitized video and speech sequences, hundreds of sound effects, and more than 100 player missions.

Also due out now is *Challenge of the Five Realms*, an FRP of tremendous size — it has a 6.2-meg cinematic intro. (Look for coverage in our next issue.) Paragon announced that

both *Mantis* and *Five Realms* will be released with significant enhancements in CD-ROM format later this fall. The CD-ROM *Mantis* is expected to be about 500 megabytes.

Also coming this fall from Paragon is *Megatraveller 3: The Unknown Worlds*. This series' latest installment promises that game worlds will be generated randomly so that no two people play the same game, nor explore the same universe. A new interface is expected for the game, and there will be three distinct scenarios, each of which can be played separately.

**Psygnosis:** The group that brought us *Lemmings* appears to be in fine form with its latest offerings. This fall, look for *Bill's Tomato Game*, a humorous, simple-to-play arcade game (looks addictive); *Hired Guns*, a unique four-player adventure game with multiple viewing windows that's like nothing else on the market; *Walker*, an arcade-style shooter in which you control a vehicle that bears a strong resemblance to the walkers in *The Empire Strikes Back*; and *Carl Lewis Challenge*, a track-and-field arcade/strategy game that features digitized images of real Olympic athletes. Lewis puts emphasis on proper training and practice before competition. Events include javelin, 400-meter hurdles, long jump, 100-meter sprint, and high jump. The animation (we saw a preview on a 386SX) is amazingly fluid, especially for digitized images.

**QQP:** The next title to come from this small New Jersey-based publisher is *Conquered Kingdoms*, a military strategy game. We saw only very early screens, which we were told would be reworked. The QQP people think that *Conquered Kingdoms*, due out this fall, will generate more excitement than their award-winning debut titles, *Perfect General* and *Lost Admiral*.

**ReadySoft:** Two titles announced at last CES, *Guy Spy* and *International Sports Challenge*, should have become available as this issue went to press. New titles due this fall include *Dragon's Lair III*, *Eye of the Storm* (a futuristic space

[illegible]

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adventure), *CyberSpace* (a science-fiction RPG set in a world peopled by high-tech street punks), and *Campaign*, a historical simulation set in Europe in World War II.

Sierra: If we can call MicroProse "MicroProlific" by virtue of its sheer number of new titles, consider Sierra On-Line as Sierra Un-Leashed. *Laura Bow in the Dagger of Amn Ra* (see our Sneak Peek from last issue) is now available. Also on shelves now is a new line of \$9.95 titles called Nick's Picks. In these budget-priced games, Sierra has extracted sections of games from previous titles and

coupled them with some famous Sierra personas. The Nick's Picks line includes *Roger Wilco's Spaced-Out Game Pack*, *Leisure Suit Larry's Casino*, *Robin Hood's Games of Skill and King's Chance*, *Parlor Games with Laura Bow*, and *King Graham's Board Game Challenge*.

Continuing the more traditional Sierra fare is *King's Quest VI*, the biggest game in the series yet. Sierra tells us that 30-40% of the game is optional, minimizing frustration for beginning players. KQVI's story centers on a shipwrecked Prince Alexander. Look for the game in October.

*Space Quest V: Roger Wilco in The Next Mutation* is due for release in November, and *Quest for Glory III: The Wages of War* will be out by summer's end. *Glory III* can be played as a stand-alone game, independent of the first two installments, and *Glory II* fans can import their saved character.

New educational titles from Sierra include a 256-color VGA version of *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* (late summer); *The Island of Dr. Brain*, a sequel to the acclaimed *Castle of Dr. Brain* (August); *Quarky & Quaysoo's TurboScience*, an animated intro to the world of science for ages eight and up (November); *Twisty History*, a game that challenges children to put historical people and events in the correct time context (November); and *EcoQuest: The*



Quest for Glory III



Quarky & Quaysoo's TurboScience

*Lost Secret of the Rainforest*, a follow-up to the highly regarded *EcoQuest: The Search for Cetus* (reviewed last issue). Look for *Rainforest* to be available in December.

For Windows users, Sierra has just released *Take-A-Break! Pinball*, five fast-paced



Take-A-Break! Pinball for Windows



Screen Antics: Johnny Castaway

pinball games, each with unique rules and strategies, and in August will ship *Take-A-Break! Crosswords*, a collection of more than 100 different crossword puzzles, each playable on different difficulty levels.

Due in September is *Incredible Machine*, a logic game in which you design a machine from more than 50 parts (pulleys, see-saws, conveyor belts, etc.) in order to solve a puzzle. There are more than 100 levels of play. Consider *Incredible Machine* as a thinking man's erector set.

A rather innovative program due out late this summer is *Screen Antics: Johnny Castaway*, an animated screensaver that tells a story. Once installed, the story in *Screen Antics* evolves over time, and includes special events tied to various holidays. The length of the story can be determined by the user.

The Software Toolworks: The big news from this fast-growing publisher was its aggressive push into CD-ROM entertainment products. Most of the titles, slated for later this year, are CD-ROM versions of popular PC games. Look for coverage in an upcoming issue.

#### Spectrum

**HoloByte:** Scheduled to be on shelves any day now is *Tetris Classic*, a sound-and-graphics enhanced version of the classic puzzlegame.

A hi-res Windows version is to follow shortly. Also due out shortly is *Operation-*

*Fighting Tiger*, the first of two planned *Falcon 3.0* campaign disks. *Fighting Tiger* lets you fly the Japanese Air Force's FSX (a modified F-16), into India/Pakistan, Japan/Russia, and North Korea.

Due this fall are a 3-D animated chess game (as yet untitled) and a new sim, *Warthog A-10*. Beyond these products, Spectrum is working on a graphic adventure based on their license for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. It could be out by early '93.

Spirit of Discovery: The name might be new, but the company is not. Spirit of Discovery is the publishing name for Park Place Productions, the development group responsible for a wide variety of titles from the past few years (Data East's *Monday Night Football* and *Dream Team Basketball* for the PC, Electronic Arts' *John Madden Football* for the Genesis and Super Nintendo, as well as the award-winning *NHL Hockey* for the Sega

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Genesis — and these are just a few of the games in their portfolio). Several of their new titles will be distributed by Konami.



Facts in Action

On the market shortly will be *Facts in Action*, an educational title for ages six and up. Based on the classic concentration game, *Facts* has three levels of play, and is designed to teach through audio feedback and animated VGA graphics.

Another educational title, due out this fall, is *Body Illustrated* (ages 12 to adult), an interactive learning tool that lets the user explore the systems and structures of the human body. Also shipping this fall is *Beat*

*Body the House*, a casino simulator that features five games and includes an on-line tutor. It hosts up to four human players.

SSI: The three new titles the veteran game publisher had on display clearly indicated the company's new approach. *Dark Sun*: *Shattered Lands*, *M*, and *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic 1939-1943*, all due for fall release, looked stunning, with the first two sporting full-screen graphics. All of these games are in categories where SSI has traditionally had strength — *Dark Sun* is an AD&D title with a new gaming engine and 256-color VGA graphics; *M* is science-fiction FRP, the first in a series, that was developed with Autodesk's 3-D CAD system; and *Great Naval Battles* is a combat simulation set in the North Atlantic during World War II. In *Great Naval Battles*, players can take the role of admiral,



Dark Sun

fleet commander, or ship commander, and can simulate specific scenarios or the entire '39-'43 campaign.

Three-Sixty: *Theatre of War* is an amazingly handsome war-strategy game that's played on a highly textured chesslike board. It's a multifaceted, abstract kind of simulation, with beautiful animated sequences, hi-res (640X400) VGA graphics, and charming sound. War can be waged on any number of conceptual levels, ranging from ancient times (Roman, Medieval) to futuristic high-tech systems. *Theatre of War* will be available shortly.

If you wonder what a land-based *Harpoon* might be like, check out *Patriot*, shipping this fall. One of 20 scenarios in the simulation's initial *BattleSet* will be the Persian Gulf. *Patriot* was

supermarkets, drug stores, and other retail outlets (as far as we know, the first software with that method of distribution) include *Casino Craps*, *Amarillo Slim's 7-Card Stud*, and *Dr. Wong's Jacks+ Video Poker*. One brand new title in the series is *On Target*, an arcade-style artillery game.

Virgin Games: The first title in Virgin's new fantasy adventure series, *Fables & Friends*, is *The Legend of Kyrandia*. Developed by Westwood Studios (designers of the *Eye of the Beholder* titles), *Kyrandia* is a series of 25 magical, fairy-tale scenarios tied together



Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic 1939-1943

into one large quest. Look for the game any day now.

Another imminent release is *Heimdall*, a conversion of an award-winning Amiga title in Europe. *Heimdall* is an RPG loosely based on Norse mythology, and it contains numerous sub-games. Due this fall are DOS and M Windows versions of *Monopoly Deluxe*,



designed in conjunction with the Game Designer's Workshop.

Another fall title from Three-Sixty will be *V for Victory*, in which the player assumes the role of military strategist during WWII's Normandy Invasion. *Victory* offers six scenarios, beginner through expert levels, and as much or as little hands-on control as desired.

Villa Crespo: The Coffee Break Series is a new line of \$12.95 games that are essentially modules taken from previously released Villa Crespo casino titles. The new budget line, which will be distributed at

based on the classic board game, and *Floor 13*, an under-\$20 espionage thriller with political intrigue, will be on shelves late this summer.

Guest, the CD-ROM game we covered in our Winter CES story a few months back, is coming along nicely, and is highly impressive. We're hearing that it will ship on two compact disks. Look for more on *Guest* in an upcoming issue.



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# THE DESKTOP GENERAL

## DAN BUNTEN'S GLOBAL CONQUEST: A GAME TO TOPPLE "EMPIRES"!

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Having finally burned-out on *Empire* about mid-1991, I've been searching desperately for something equally addictive to replace it. *The Perfect General* would come close if it had sea and air components and a custom scenario generator. But it would still lack the fascinating economic sub-text in *Empire*, that Sineus-of-War element which adds so much depth and fascination. Last year's *Command HQ* also came close, but was a bit too simplistic to put the same hooks into me as *Empire* (although it's one of the best quickie beer-and-pretzels war games around). Now, however, comes *Global Conquest*, the brainchild of Dan Buntin, one of this industry's most respected game designers. Simply put, this Microprose sequel to *Command HQ* is the most addictive program to hit my hard drive since, well, good ol' *Empire*.

By liberally borrowing concepts from every preceding "Guns-or-Butter" game ever marketed, then mixing them with fascinating ideas of his own, Buntin has created a game of exploration and conquest that has all the depth and repeatability of *Empire*. Better yet, *Global Conquest* develops much more quickly and vigorously, avoiding (at least during all the games I've played so far) those long periods of build-up that could try the patience of even the most avid *Empire* fan.

Buntin has incorporated an enormous range of tactical, strategic, and economic options in this game, tied them together with the sleekest interface since *The Perfect General*, and clothed the entire package in wonderfully detailed and high-spirited

graphics.

During the days I spent making this game's acquaintance, I found myself chortling aloud time and time again at

for years. Up to four humans can play (the computer, of course, can take the place of any or all of them), and modem play is not only available, it

may be the optimum way to enjoy this delightful concoction.

Just to keep things interesting, the game generates random events every few turns. These come in two flavors:

Tame and Wild. Even the tame ones, such as earthquakes and native uprisings, can have a drastic effect on a campaign. As for the aptly named wild events...well, there's one called "A Visit From the Pope," which causes all bellicose activity, including weapons' production, to cease for five turns; and another one which causes all battleship units to grow wheels for five turns, so you can use them on land!

One of the magical qualities about this game, in fact, is the way in which Buntin's sense of the zany makes the war game aspect more interesting, even though party poopers might complain about what it does to realism. But this game does such an incredible job of sucking you into its universe that fuddy-duddy considerations of realism become irrelevant.

The long wait for a sequel to *Empire* — one that incorporated every wished-for detail and feature missing from that classic — is finally over. Bravo, maestro!



some of the creative extras Buntin has thrown in. One is the ability to select an appropriate icon for your empire: depending on your mood, you can depict yourself with an iron cross, a mailed fist, a death's head, a nasty little man sticking out his tongue, a mushroom cloud, and even a yin-yang symbol.

Each game takes place on a randomly generated world, hidden until you explore it (just as in *Empire*). Although you



choose from several basic kinds of games, no two games are remotely alike. And to cap off the whole noble enterprise, Buntin has included a customizing option that should keep habitual "tweakers" going



**B**ack in the autumn of 1987, just after I started reviewing games and just after the first issue of this magazine came out, Selby Bateman went by my desk on his way to lunch and dropped a copy of *Empire* in front of me. "We've already reviewed this," he said, "but you might get a kick out of it anyway."

He probably came to regret that gesture, for by the end of the afternoon, I had become the resident *Empire* addict. The game never left my hard drive for the next five years. I became obsessed with generating bizarre maps and with trying to force the program to do stuff it wasn't designed to do, like letting me start the game where I wanted to start it, not where the computer threw me randomly. I played epic games that went on for weeks of real time, sometimes coming into the office at night and on weekends, but never, of course, playing while there was other work to do (cough, cough).



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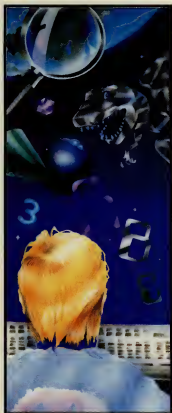
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## PRESCHOOL PICKS

LESLIE EISER



face (with or without mouse) is a pleasure to use. The black-and-white backgrounds are straight out of the movie sets - farm scenes from *Rock-a-Doodle*, tropical rain forests from *FernGully*, and shots of Kevin slapping his cheeks from *Home Alone*.

Of the three, *FernGully* is my favorite. You start by picking one of six different backgrounds and then flip to the figure selector. There are 22 different images here, including all of the main characters and some of the minor ones. Click to select a figure, place it anywhere on any background, and start coloring. Erase, Undo, and Quit options are included, and the program supports a host of popular printers.

More clearly educational, and just as much fun to use, is *MetroGnomes' Music* from The Learning Company. You start off in a meadow filled with a lively group of animated pixies. Known for their singing skills, these pixies would love to teach everyone in your house the words to 27 folk songs. But *MetroGnomes' Music* isn't just about sing-alongs — it's also about notes, pitch, rhythm, and beat.

A visit to the land of Giant Mushrooms isn't complete without a game of Hi-Lo Rescue. Here, you start by listening to two musical notes. If

you can correctly tell whether the second note is higher or lower than the first, you get to see one of the inhabitants jump into the Fire Department's net. Get four right and the rescued gnomes play one of their songs for you, karaoke style. The words scroll by as the music plays, but supplying the voice is up to you.

In the Flower Garden you play a memory game with musical clues, and you can practice following a beat at the Parade Ground. In both games, the reward is musical — from a sing-along in the Flower Garden to a march by the Gnome Town Band on the Parade Ground. What makes both of these games particularly useful are the way they can adjust to the user's skill level. Give the correct answer immediately, and the game is a bit harder the next time you play. Miss often, and the program automatically makes the game easier.

Brilliant colors, attention to detail, and a versatile color palette makes *FernGully: The Computerized Coloring Book* highly appealing to young children.



Three new computerized coloring books from Capstone are based on recent feature films for the younger audience: *Rock-a-Doodle*, *FernGully*, and *Home Alone*. For those with VGA graphics, these coloring books are absolutely stunning. A 16-color palette with color-mixing capabilities lets you access a rainbow of 256 colors, and the point-and-click inter-

Gnometown Stage gives young music lovers a chance to compose their own tunes, experiment with different rhythm patterns, and participate in some free-form musical play. Five xylophones are provided, each tuned harmonically so that it's impossible to produce a dissonant chord. The three musicians on stage play a variety of different instruments, and, with a sound card, you can hear your composition on pan flute, harp, trumpet, or guitar. Clicking on the conductor changes the rhythm pattern, letting you hear the same notes played in several different ways.

What makes *MetroGnomes' Music* truly outstanding is the quality of sound. Even without a sound card, the music is clear, the tunes decipherable, and the sing-along segments enjoyable. It goes without saying that the music is even better with a supported sound card.

If you don't have a sound card, you won't know what you're missing — but if you do, *MetroGnomes' Music* will make you glad you made the investment.

GP



Adorable tunes and cute sound effects help *MetroGnomes' Music* encourage preschool sing-alongs — karaoke style.



The *MetroGnome* in the flower garden can help you find the flower that hides the matching musical phrase.

# Game Players

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5NPHO

# ALTERNATE LIVES

## UNDERWORLD UTOPIA

NEIL RANDALL

of advanced hardware adds up to a better game. It's hard to say, of course, because there's no way of knowing what *Underworld* would have been like as a 286-capable game. What I can report is that it succeeds in areas where other first-person dungeon fantasy RPGs have failed, providing the basis for some extremely intriguing possibilities in future designs. Without question, it's a winner.

Your task is to liberate an experimental city built smack-dab in the Great Stygian Abyss, a pretty nasty place in the *Ultima* series. The idea was to bring together several species of beings to make the city work properly, but eventually things broke down. Ostensibly you're out to rescue the inevitable damsel in distress who's been kidnapped by trolls and carried deep into the abyss's lower depths, but as in practically all fantasy RPGs this is just a

convenient plot point. What you're really trying to do is to see how far you can progress.

In that sense, *Underworld* varies little from most fantasy RPGs. You create a

character (just one), head into the dungeon's first level, then fight, think, and negotiate your way from level to level. But *Underworld* is substantially different in a number of important ways, and these will make or break your final opinion of the game.



The lower levels of the Stygian Abyss are home to creatures much more fierce than those you encounter early in your adventure.



The auto-mapping feature is attractive, effective, and simple to use.

For starters, the interface is superb. Entirely mouse-controlled, the interface lets you move, fight, pick things up and drop them, eat, cast spells, examine and use items, and save and restore games with a series of simple clicks. Second, there's more to be gained by interacting with non-player characters (at least on the upper levels) than by destroying monsters. In fact, you can often avoid combat completely by just backing away.

But the game's most important feature is its graphical view. The dungeon looks as realistic as any computer dungeon has ever looked, and you see ceilings, walls, floors with real slopes and drops, bridges, doors, and other people and creatures with excellent clarity. Combine these top-rate graphics with excellent animation, and it's easy to believe that you're actually moving along the corridors.

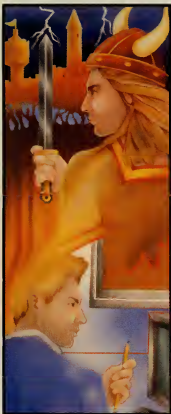
You move by holding the left mouse button down and maneuvering the mouse up, down, sideways, or horizontally, and once you get the hang of it you can tear along at amazing speed (especially on a 486). The game provides the best first-person perspective I've seen yet—better even than most flight simulators—and I

can hardly wait to see the incorporation of such virtual reality dreams as peripheral vision and the swinging around of the head for a quick look.

Another excellent feature is the game's map. As you move through the game, *Underworld's* auto-mapping feature lets you worry about the task at hand instead of keeping an ongoing map. It's extremely attractive and more detailed than most FRP maps, clearly showing doors, bridges, and waterways (you can swim in this game, by the way, and you'll have to do so fairly often), and it's easily accessed by clicking on the map icon in your inventory. Impressively, you can also customize the map by writing on it; just click when the quill is in position, then type whatever you want. Very well done.

Obviously, I like this game. It's a hardware hog, and I hate reconfiguring my system just to play it, but its rewards are strong. If you like fantasy RPGs, and if you have the necessary machinery, you'll want to experience it for yourself.

GP



One look at the hardware requirements for *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* will go a long way in affecting your decision to make the purchase: you must have a 386SX or better, 256-color VGA, 2 megs of RAM and expanded memory capability, and no less than 8 megabytes free on your hard drive. *Ultima Underworld* is among the first of a new style of PC games, developed without any compromise in design decisions in order to satisfy lower-end PC users. Whether or not this works out for Origin remains to be seen. True, the 386 is now considered the entry-level DOS machine, but there's still a huge number of 286s out there in game land.

The real question, though, is whether or not the utilization



Jumping into this underground stream may seem a logical way to escape imprisonment, but the water can hold some nasty surprises.



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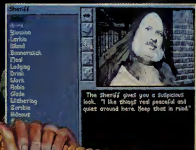
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## ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE

BERNARD YEE

Origin Systems' Ultima series is one of the true pillars of computer fantasy role-playing. Its roots go back to a zip-locked Apple II game called *Akallabeth*, but Origin's latest installment, *Ultima VII: The Black Gate*, has about as much in common with its first ancestor as — well, as my 486/33 SVGA powerhouse has in common with a 48K Apple II. Origin has always prided itself on pushing the technology envelope, and, with *Ultima VII*, it certainly has, for better or for worse. You'll need 21 megabytes of free hard drive space, 2

megs of RAM, VGA, and a 386/20 to run it all. It's quite a gamble to require gamers to have such a powerful system.

Both *Ultima VII* and *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* (see "Alternate Lives" elsewhere this issue) carry on the traditions of computer role-playing games. Where *Underworld* gives you a first-person perspective (Sir-Tech's approach with the first game in its Wizardry series), *Ultima VII* — like all the previous *Ultimas* game — uses an overhead view. (Earlier *Ultimas* did switch to a first-person view when spelunking, however.) And *Ultima* creator Lord British's (aka Richard Garriott) obsession with providing a moral framework and a cohesive storyline has reached a new pinnacle in *Ultima VII*.

The storyline is familiar. Britannia, the alternate world where your alter-ego is hailed as the Avatar, a paragon of heroic virtue, is in need yet again. *Ultima VII* begins with a tranquil scene, only to be interrupted by a glowing, omi-



When you first arrive in Trinsic, you'll discover *Ultima VII*'s new interface and a series of gruesome ritual killings that made Origin voluntarily rate this game for "mature players only."

nous face — the Guardian — who tells you that he soon will take his rightful place as the ruler of Britannia. The graphics and digitized speech (for players with appropriate sound cards) are impressive, and set the ominous tone for things to come. Your character leaps through a moongate to find...murder.

Things have not been well in Britannia during the time you were away. A wave of ritual killings have stunned the populace. Magic no longer works properly. The Britannian equivalent of drug use rears its head. This context makes *Ultima VII* rich and rewarding; the beauty of the game lies in its plots, subplots, and the relationships among non-player characters, all of which evolve and grow throughout the game. Mini-quests, which may be unrelated to the main quest (the Guardian) add depth to the game universe.

Issues of good and evil are central to game play. Who is the Guardian? Has he done "evil"? Then there's the Fellowship, an association of individuals dedicated to what

appear to be worthy ideals — but why do they seem so unsavory? *Ultima* veterans can't help but notice a similarity between the Fellowship and Blackthorne's rise to power in *Ultima V*.

*Ultima VII* achieves realism by making your characters act within a moral framework. As the Avatar, for example, you're discouraged from stealing and other malfeasance. You don't know if, as in *Ultima Underworld*, there's a hidden karma counter that will penalize you for your bad deeds in subtle ways, and your indecision makes your decisions all the more difficult.

The dilemmas here may be subtle, but the action is not. Origin has "voluntarily" rated this game for mature players only; murder victims are displayed with dismembered body parts and generous pools of blood. The branching musical themes add to the sense of foreboding.

One of the first items on your agenda will be to get up to speed with current events. You'll find it helpful to gather old friends like Dupre and Iolo



With digitized speech and stunning graphics, *The Guardian* appears during *Ultima VII*'s introduction to tell you that all's not well in Britannia.

and talk to them. You'll also want to talk to the populace. Character interaction takes place through a comprehensive conversation system, reminiscent of a LucasArts adventure where you and each character have a range of possible responses, queries, and comments, depending on your relationship and the flow of the conversation. Your choices dynamically change as the game progresses and each branch of conversation is distinct, providing a sense that your conversation reflects a developing relationship, rather than serving as a mere recitation of relevant facts. Sadly, there is no note-taking feature, nor is there automapping—features which games like *Magic Candle II* and *Ultima Underworld* (the finest automapping system ever) have made state-of-the-art.

With eight levels of power, spellcasting is a complex affair. As in prior Ultimas, you must mix the right reagents to cast any spell worth its spell points. The combat system is detailed and has elements of real strategy, but is conducted in real-

time, which may be annoying to many gamers. There are nine combat modes which can be set to make the best use of each party member's strengths, weaknesses, and current condition. Characters can be ordered to attack certain opponents, to evade, or even to protect wounded or weak party members. Much of the beginning phases of the game passed before I encountered hostile creatures, but rest assured that an extensive bestiary provides ample fodder for those inclined toward hack 'n' slash. But the real goal of *Ultima VII* is to solve a mystery, not to rack up a huge body count.

The game itself adheres to the Ultima formula of a top-down view. Gone, however, are the tiles which characterized previous Ultimas—*Ultima VII* sports a rich, full-screen VGA display with no apparent interface. Origin has taken point-and-click to the extreme—every interface feature can be accessed with a two-button mouse. Click on your character, and his display and vital stats appear. Click on his sack, and



Combat takes place in real time. There isn't too much early in the game—but there's plenty later on.

its contents appear. Each display is a movable window, and items—which, true to the Origin philosophy, have physical characteristics like size and weight—can be dragged and dropped. (You may find yourself in a "pixel hunt" to discover important objects.) Although *Ultima VII* doesn't demand a mouse, the keyboard interface is clumsy.

Lord British has sought to provide a realistic fantasy universe. Once again, objects exist with unique, logical properties (bakesome wheat, for example, and you have bread). And since all the NPCs carry on their lives according to the hours in the day, you can watch castle servants prepare bread or butter the same way. The real world is represented in a basic yet powerful way: clouds pass overhead, lightning flashes, and you can even turn on street lamps in towns after sunset. It's tempting to get involved in playing with the world around you, but you're on a noble quest, remember?

Brittania is a huge place; there are 16 major areas of import, and the wilderness in-between can be as equally diverting. This is where I truly missed an overhead map or automapping; you have to rely on the cloth map that comes with the



The context-sensitive conversation system makes you feel like a real dialogue is developing, rather than a recitation of relevant facts. After Trinsic, you should see Lord British, who spends too much time in his castle and not enough among the people.

game (encrypted in runes you'll have to translate as copy protection — truly annoying) to figure out where to go. Beyond that, you must rely on plodding along in the general direction. Towns have their own individual communities and townspeople with vocations — artists, armorers, healers, and even homeless people. Trinsic, for example, is home of Paladins and the starting point for your adventure. Paws is a virtual shantytown. In the beginning, a major part of your quest is following two travelers from town to town, completing side-quests in each town all the while.

All this is enchantingly absorbing, but for many gamers, technology is the major issue here, and *Ultima VII*'s strengths and weaknesses are defined by Origin's cutting-edge technology. With *Ultima VII*, it's easy to see why some players feel that Origin has gone too far. *Ultima VII* requires its own boot sequence — a mouse driver, disk cache, and HIMEM.SYS. *Ultima VII* uses its own memory manager called Voodoo, and a little magic is really what this game requires to run properly. Even on my 486/33, animation was choppy due to the constant disk access — understandable when you consider the voluminous data involved in a world where each object is painstakingly defined.

Hyperdisk, a shareware disk-caching program from Hyperware, works minor miracles in speeding up game play when you activate the staged disk-write feature. Other options include Norton's NCACHE or Microsoft's

SMARTDRV. And DasBoot, a shareware multiple-boot utility, is a godsend, allowing you to use multiple boot configurations right off your hard drive. These shareware gems are available on CompuServe, GENie and America On-Line, and are worth every penny of their registration fee.

And let's face it — it's just a little unreasonable to expect a recreational user to have 21 megs of free disk space for a game, and around 500K for each saved game. *Ultima VII* takes up almost as much memory as a full-blown OS/2 2.0 setup (which is apparently incompatible with *Ultima VII*), or more memory than Windows 3.1, Norton Desktop, and MSDOS 5.0 combined.

Like other complex software packages, *Ultima VII* isn't free from bugs either, and though *Ultima VII* was released relatively close to schedule (as opposed to games like *Magic Candle II* and *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*), it has too many noteworthy bugs. Keys may disappear from your inventory when you sleep. Origin first called this an "inventory management feature," but if it's not documented, and it causes players angst and inconvenience, it's not a "feature."

Other objects can disappear as well. Upon coming to the second murder site, the milling townspeople were in full force, but the bodies — and a piece of evidence — were mysteriously absent. And I've even heard reports of the entire town of Britannia disappearing as well! A newer version of *Ultima VII* will be released, and a bug patch has been posted on



The interface opens up a series of windows which provide character statistics and display the contents of your backpack.

various on-line services, but this patch only corrects the disappearing key bug. Origin doesn't conduct outside beta-testing, but perhaps it's time. Gamers expect, and deserve, a bug-free game when they shell out as much as \$79.95 for a 21-meg game.

*Ultima VII* reaches new heights of both achievement and frustration in fantasy role-playing. Origin has provided a richly detailed world for you to explore, one that can provide you with a delicious gaming experience. Yet the experience is marred by inadequate debugging and, in my opinion, an arrogance that verges on hubris in requiring you to run a special boot just to play this game. A disk cache should come with *Ultima VII* (along with its memory manager), and Origin should accept more responsibility for bugs in the software. It's also becoming clear that we're reaching the limits of the storage medium as well. Digitized voices and animation gobble up lots of hard-drive space, and CD-ROM is the obvious method of storage; other aspects of disk access can be played off the faster hard drive. Still, when played on a powerful high-end machine, *Ultima VII* is unquestionably a groundbreaking release. Just remember that there can be a downside to the cutting edge.

GP



In the town of Minoc, you're supposed to discover another murder site at the sawmill, but a program bug — one of several — made the corpses disappear.

**Hardware requirements:** 2 MB of RAM; 386 or better (20MHz or faster strongly suggested); hard drive; VGA graphics; disk cache recommended; supports Sound Blaster and compatible sound cards; mouse recommended.



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# DARK SEED

STEPHEN POOLE

As soon as you lay eyes on this debut title from newcomer Cyberdreams, you're likely to be impressed. The packaging is unique and eye-catching: a



Dawson's headaches have turned him into a full-blown aspirin junkie. Be sure to start each day with a trip to the medicine cabinet and a quick shower.

raised diamond-shaped area in the middle of the box cover sports a surreal, haunting portrait of a beautiful woman — beautiful, that is, until you spot the mechanical attachments connected to her ashen cheeks, or the snake slithering from a skull atop her head.

Near the top of the box, just under the title, is the legend "Based upon the fantastic artwork of H. R. GIGER." Even if you're not familiar with Giger, chances are you've at least seen his most famous creation: the title "character" in *Alien*, a movie which heavily influenced the look of science-fiction films. Giger's fusion of surrealism and biomechanics — the synthesis

of flesh and machine — is simultaneously beautiful and horrifying, hypnotic yet repulsive, and acquiring the rights to use it in a PC game was a coup for Cyberdreams.

Unfortunately, once you get into *Dark Seed*, you'll probably agree that Giger's art is the game's strongest point. Cyberdreams' rendering of Giger's art is indeed captivating — but it's not enough to make up for numerous flaws in design and execution.

In this graphic adventure/horror game, you assume the role of Mike Dawson, a would-be novelist seeking inspiration in an isolated section of the town of Woodland Hills. As soon as

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you take up residence in your new home, you begin having nightmares that leave you with the mother of all headaches. The opening screen of the game, in fact, is one of these nightmares, and at first view, it's wickedly effective. Dawson's forehead is literally ripped open, then an alien embryo is injected into his cranial cavity. There's no way to bypass this segment, however, and about the twentieth time around it loses all impact.

It turns out that an alien embryo really has been planted in Dawson's head, and using clues left by the previous (now dead) resident and an unknown benefactor, you must find a way to reach the aliens (or "An-

cient") and send them back where they came from. It's an excellent premise for a graphic adventure, sort of a sci-fi version of the classic film *D.O.A.*

*Dark Seed* uses an icon-based interface similar to one found in Dynamix's games. By clicking on the right mouse button, the cursor cycles through a hand, question mark, or an arrow. Move the question mark around the screen, for example, and it changes to an exclamation point if you can look at an object; move the hand over the screen, and it becomes a pointing finger if you can take an object. It's efficient and easy to master.

*Dark Seed* takes place in two distinct settings: the Normal



There's plenty to choose from in the store, but only one item is essential to Dawson's quest. Save your game, then purchase an item — if you don't get an immediate response, reload and buy something else.

World of Woodland Hills, and the Dark World. The Dark World, which mirrors the Normal World, is home of the Ancients, and Ciger's unmistakable art is used exclusively here.

# by the game itself.



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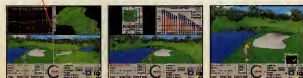
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Check out every headstone in the cemetery. The in-jokes on the tombstones are funny (do you recognize S. Nostromo?), but you really need to find the grave of someone who went through what you're experiencing.

Giger insisted that *Cyberdreams* use hi-res (640 X 350) VGA graphics, and the fact that they chose standard VGA — a 16-

When you come to this impasse, remember two things: the *Dark World* is a mirror image of the *Normal World*, and this toothy critter is as dumb as a dog.



color palette, at that resolution — doesn't hurt the look of the *Dark World* scenes one bit. After all, Giger doesn't often use yellows, reds, or other bright colors.

But the renderings of the different locations in the *Normal World*, though finely detailed, start to look similar because of the limited number of colors. *Cyberdreams'* designers limited themselves to a single 16-color palette by always surrounding the redraw area of the



As you explore this nursery, you realize that the inhabitants of the *Dark World* have made a place just for you.

screen with the same 16-color frame, and consequently the art inside the frame had to utilize the same 16 colors from scene to scene. Different frames (or no frame) would have allowed for different palettes, and a welcome dose of visual variety.

The animation in the game was produced by videotaping actors, then reproducing each frame of motion. Mike Dawson moves smoothly enough, and his size changes appropriately as he moves toward or away from you. But here again *Dark Seed* lacks variety; only one character and a dog actually move from one place to another in the *Normal World*, and no characters move in the *Dark World*. If anything else is animated at the same time — a clock pendulum, for example — the animation of the characters becomes extremely choppy.

There are other disturbing elements in game play. Dawson is on a very tight timetable, but the *only* place you can find the time is on a clock in the living room of your house. The few characters you meet are completely flat and undeveloped: one character who invites you to his "house" (nowhere in sight) simply stands there until you offer him an inventory item, then utters a word of thanks and walks away.

*Dark Seed* is a fairly difficult game, but a large part of that difficulty is rooted in what I call the "fortune-telling syndrome." In other words, you *cannot* know what actions to take at a given point until you play well into the game and learn from bitter (and time-consuming) experience that you should have done something two hours back. Luckily, you're given 75 save-game slots, but once you've got 20 or 30 saved games, you'll encounter what may be the game's biggest weakness: its load and save functions.

A saved game title can have only eight characters; i.e., you're naming a DOS file. It's hard



You'll be stuck for eternity (or at least until death) if you didn't leave yourself a present in the *Normal World* counterpart of this jail.

enough to describe what's happening at a given point with only eight characters, a shortcoming made worse by the exclusion of numbers or special characters. Click to save a game, and you must save; there's no cancel option.

When you try load a saved game, your *oldest* saved game is presented first; when I was near completion of *Dark Seed*, I had to click 23 times on the scroll button to reach my latest saved game. Like the save function, there's no cancel option—even if you chose the function by mistake, you have to load something. Worst of all, you're not presented with the usual options to restore, restart, or quit when you die; instead, you're either kicked out to DOS or sent back to the compulsory intro sequence. On my 386SX/16, that meant around two minutes of sitting on my hands waiting to give it another shot.

I was eager to play *Dark Seed* from the minute I first saw it, and the disappointment I experienced once I'd played for a while may have been exacerbated by my high expectations for the game. This is *Cyberdreams* very first game, and if they can correct the fundamental flaws found in *Dark Seed*, their next title — a futuristic racing simulation called *Cyber Race*, developed in collaboration with renowned industrial designer Syd Mead — could very well deliver on its potential.

GP

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM (596K free for sound board support); 12-MHz 286 or better; hard disk; VGA graphics; supports Adlib, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; supports joystick and mouse (mouse strongly recommended).



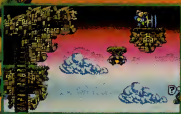
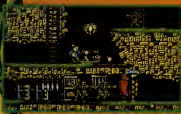
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# INDIANA JONES AND

LESLIE MIZELL

It's got no snakes, no bugs, and no rats — OK, there's one snake — but *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* has all the other elements that made the movie series so much fun to watch. And since you're in charge of the action in this game, you're even more a part of the serial-type adventure.

The Third Reich is up to its dirty Nazi tricks again, this time trying to harness the vast energy of the legendary city of Atlantis. As LucasArts' *Fate of Atlantis* opens, Dr. Indiana Jones is searching the dusty corners of Barnett College for a statue, while his colleague Marcus is held at gunpoint by a Gestapo agent. When the statue is recovered, even the great archaeologist can't determine its origin.

Kerner, the despicable Nazi, escapes with the statue, and Indiana turns to Sophia Hapgood for help. Once a colleague, Sophia has turned from archaeology to psychic phenomenon, claiming that a god from Atlantis channels through her. As Indiana and So-



Power-hungry Nazis, mad scientists with plans to rule the world, and mythic treasures — what more could a graphic adventurer ask?

phia join forces, their quest takes them from Iceland and Tikal to Monte Carlo and Crete before they find the sunken city.

Like all adventures of this type, it's important to pick up everything you see and to save the game whenever trouble rears its ugly head. But in *Fate of Atlantis*, it's more important than to retrieve the items you've already used. Sure, you may never need that clay jar again, but the hinge pin might come in handy some other time. Better safe than sorry.

There's also some pretty complicated dialogue going on,



You won't see this smash-up unless you're playing in Wits mode. You've foiled the Nazi kidnap plot, but now you must find the Moonstone that M. Trotter threw from the taxi window.



No matter which version you play, you need that gold box (and the beads found underneath it). The late Professor Sternhart provides you with everything you need to get the Atlantean elevator going again.

so unless you're an expert on Atlantis and its legends, you should take notes. The *Lost Dialogue of Plato* is full of hints, so read it carefully whenever you're stuck. There are also a few tips dropped into the normal game-play instructions in the *Atlantis* manual.

One thing, however, that isn't made clear is how to use the Sunstone, Moonstone, and Worldstone — the keys to doors all through the game. It's difficult to explain, but just remem-

ber that once you've used the Sunstone, you should keep it in the position you first set it until you reach Atlantis. Put the Moonstone, and then the Worldstone, in place as if the Sunstone is fastened in that first position.

With *Fate of Atlantis*, LucasArts rises above the competition in graphic adventures, partly because of what it calls "self-tuning" games. Like the easy "Game Lite" option in *LeChuck's Revenge: Monkey Is-*

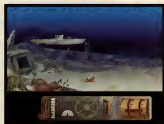
# THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

land 2, *Fate of Atlantis* offers different playing modes for gamers of all styles.

A third of the way into *Atlantis*, you finally uncover the Lost Dialogue. At that point, you have a conversation with Sophia, in which you decide whether you're going to play a cooperative game with her (Team mode), a solo thinking game (Wits mode), or a solo action game (Fists mode). The three different games vary wildly through the next third of the game, until all three converge again in *Atlantis*.

Although the *Atlantis* section of the game can get a little tedious the third time around, the second section (when you're searching for the three stones) differs so radically from version to version that you'll have a blast trying all three.

For example, from Algiers you must find a dig site located somewhere in the desert. In the Team mode, you and Sophia fly a hot-air balloon across the sands. In the Wits mode, you ride a camel and bribe native officials. However, in the Action mode, you've got the same



*In Team mode, you must use all the submarine controls to pilot the vessel into the airlock. Remember that some controls don't work while others are in certain positions.*

camel, but this time you battle jeep-driving Nazis. Don't worry about Sophia in the Wits and Fists modes: Like a bad penny, she always turns up.

The Team mode seems to take the longest because it involves the most elaborate, prop-driven puzzles. The Wits game is very logical, even when it's asking you to construct a hot-air balloon or blow yourself out of a torpedo tube. Action fans, however, may be disappointed with the Fists game; aside from fisticuffs, there's surprisingly little action. You don't even pilot a balloon as you do in the other modes, although you get to squash Nazis in several cre-

ative ways. Even players who are hopeless at arcade games shouldn't hesitate to give the Fists mode a try.

All three modes are fun. Let's face it, there are a lot of role-playing games out there that are a struggle from installation through conclusion. But *Fate of Atlantis* blends strong graphics, quick animation, an excellent soundtrack (based on the John Williams *Indiana Jones* theme), snappy dialogue, a believable love-hate relationship, and humorous action into pure enjoyment.



*Thanks to you, the god-making machine is back in business. But you'll be one of the first guinea pigs unless you can talk Dr. Übermann out of it.*

Even if you get stuck on a puzzle, it's usually of the "how-could-I-be-so-stupid?" variety rather than the "that-makes-no-sense-whatsoever!" sort. In other words, all the puzzles make sense in the context of this game world. Overall, *Fate of Atlantis* is easily one of the best graphic adventures to come along.

GP



*You get to do a little skin-diving in the Fists mode, but only if you've found a valuable repair kit on the island of Thera. Even Indy's not brave enough to dive without a hole in his suit.*

**Hardware requirements:**  
640K RAM; VGA or MCGA graphics; hard drive required; supports most sound boards; supports mouse and joystick (mouse highly recommended).

# SEA ROGUE

T. LIAM McDONALD

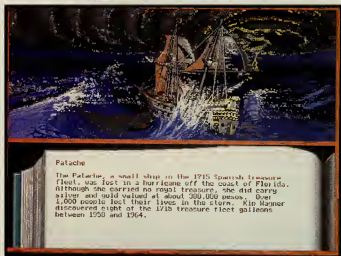
Some of us have the sea in our blood, while others will always be landlubbin' railhuggers. But don't fret if you're one of the latter. After all, the PC is the great equalizer: even the most seasick-prone wharf rat can twiddle a mouse and send a ship to the four corners of the globe on a quest for treasure and glory—or, in the case of Microplay's *Sea Rogue*, to the corners of the Atlantic Ocean.

Forget the dramamine. Never mind the bends. Toss the SCUBA gear in the closet. *Software Sorcery*, designers of the game, has thrown a ton of enthusiasm and twice as much research into the ultimate nautical treasure hunt and archaeology game.

The scenario is simple: you start with a rusty fishing trawler, a six-person crew, and the coordinates of a sunken wreck. Punch the longitude and latitude into the navigation computer and you are immediately whisked to the proper coordinates. A quick scan of the ocean floor reveals a vessel partially submerged in the sand.

Once you've chosen and equipped your four divers, send them down to the ocean floor. The wreck will be sprawled over and beneath the silt. Some treasure may be visible, but it's more likely that you'll have to sift through layer after layer of silt to come up with the goods. And watch out for sharks! Get your divers up before they run out of oxygen, and then choose whether you'll blast the treasure off the bottom, vacuum it off, or dig it out square by square. Appraise your treasure, sail into port, sell the booty, deposit your gold, buy a new treasure map at the local bar, and you're ready to head off to another wreck.

Personnel cards display all the information you need as captain to make the correct assignments.



*Sea Rogue* is a veritable treasure chest of information. After each discovery, a history of the craft and its cargo manifest is displayed.

That, in short, is the basic premise of the Novice game. At more advanced levels, enemy divers and combat figure into the equation as well.

*Sea Rogue* is a hard game to characterize. Is it role-playing? Strategy? Software toy? Simulation? Actually, it's a little bit of each. A number of elements require strategic balancing, such as combat (both simple and advanced), maintenance, allocation of resources, etc. Should you concentrate your efforts in the Gulf of Mexico, or spread out over the North Atlantic? Should you risk confronting the Spanish navy in order to excavate the Galleons of Vigo Bay? A large part of the game is played on various maps using coordinates and technology, all very

strategy-oriented elements.

On the other hand, the crew of six—including you, the captain—all have points in areas such as diving, underwater combat, wreck research, etc, and as you gain experience you become eligible for training and increased points. Sounds like something you'd find in many role-playing games.

But there's really no "winning" with *Sea Rogue*, which may qualify it as a software toy. As you work your way from trawler to research vessel to the *Sea Rogue* itself (a futuristic submarine/surface craft), you build wealth, find dozens of ships, and gain the ability to go after modern wrecks using a remote-control camera. Finding these major modern wrecks, like the *Titanic*



or the *Bismarck*, is one of the game's long-term goals. Accrual of vast sums of wealth (I made over \$3 billion in several play sessions on the Novice and Intermediate levels) is another goal, as is advancement in ratings, both in the eyes of the archaeological organizations and in comparison with your major competitors. But is there life after first place?

Game design and play is not without its problems. The save-game function is terrible, allowing up to six games to be saved, but automatically saving each under the name of the captain. After playing for some time, I had six saves with the same name, and no idea which was which. There's also no way to load saved games except at the opening menu, which means exiting and restarting the program to load a save.

The open-ended design of the game allows for maximum freedom in game play, but can also make for a seemingly endless game (you will eventually run out of wrecks.) Ambitious captains will want to go after the *Titanic*, but a question arises — how do you find it? There's no strategy to be employed in locating these major wrecks; you either buy a map or come across the coordinates in research, but this is terribly random.

I also found myself hungering for more combat sequences after I got the *Sea Rogue*. The underwater skirmishes with enemy divers are short and easily resolved, and are more of a nuisance than a threat to a well-armed diving team. Nautical combat is more interesting, but there's a paucity of adversaries. I racked up a paltry total of two nautical combats in the course of searching out over a dozen different wrecks, and actually

began looking for people to start trouble with, just so I could use all those \$1 million torpedoes I bought on the black market. Combat involving the trawler and the research vessel is limited



Head into port to buy maps, pick up new equipment, or train your crew.

to a single machine-gun placement with limited movement.

More modern wrecks would also have been welcome. After the first 30 or so wrecks involving wooden vessels, things become a bit redundant. While there are some special, historically significant discoveries that can be made on a wooden wreck, such as the Glede Gun or the gold cross of the Knights of Malta, these are few and far between. Hopefully, Microplay/Microprose will issue game supplements with new waters and new wrecks.

The game interface is well-designed and easy to learn, working equally well with either keyboard or mouse. While the most is made of higher EGA graphics, the sound is simply an annoying series of beeps. And, at least through my Sound Blaster, there wasn't even any accompanying sound for machine-gun fire.

Really, though, these are quibbles.

*Sea Rogue* may seem deliberately aimed at the nautical buff, but it should hold appeal for someone who knows nothing at all about the sea. An

enormous amount of research went into creating this game, and every bit of it is there on the screen. Each time you make a discovery and properly identify it, you get a thumbnail history of the craft and its cargo manifest. This is simply a delight, as are the occasional "encrusted items" you pull out of the silt. After a good brushing off you may find an important artifact in your hands.

One especially clever feature is the way the copy protection has been intertwined into game play. Using clues from what you find on the wreck — location, the dates on coins, certain artifacts, even a few letters from the ship's bell — you refer to the historical documentation in the manual to see which ship matches the description. Get it right, and you receive full value for your discovery; get it wrong, and you only get half value.

Any good salt will work hard to get at the helm of the *Sea Rogue* itself. Piloting that little remote-control camera through the dark, unknown rooms and halls is genuinely thrilling. We're talking vicarious archaeology at its best, created with a loving eye to detail and sure sense of history.

Bob Ballard, eat your heart out!

GP

**Hardware requirements:**  
640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse recommended.

## MAGIC CANDLE II:

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Hail fellow, well met! Buy me a flagon of that good ale and I'll read your palm for you. Let's see now....You're somewhere between 25 and 45 years old, you own a computer, and you've been hooked on fantasy ever since you read *Lord of the Rings* as an undergraduate? Right so far? Good. Innkeeper, another round if you please!

Now, don't pull away — there are many who share your addiction. 'Tis nought to be ashamed of. But what's this? Your "line of contentment" has begun to fade. Let me guess the symptoms....

You stopped playing Dungeons and Dragons socially a few years ago, right? The wife and kids, the job, the yard work...there just doesn't seem to be time any more for those weekend-long D&D marathons. And somehow the magic has gone out of book-browsing, too, hasn't it? Just

can't bring yourself to pick up another paperback with a dragon, an elf, or a unicorn on the cover, eh? Had a belly-full of trilogies, tetralogies, pentalogies and books with titles like *The Elven Horns of Farfinguen*, haven't you?

And now you're really depressed because you're also starting to burn out on computer FRPs as well. You just can't face booting up another "new" game and seeing the same old dank stone-walled corridor stretching out before you. We call that the "S.D.D.G. Syndrome" — Same Dungeon, Different Game.

You know what to expect, as soon as you roll your party of adventurers: you'll fight orcs and goblins with moronic

regularity, steal their treasure, build up experience points, fight more monsters, and sooner or later run into a brick wall in the form of an impossible riddle with an answer as obscure and illogical as possible.

And yet, my friend, and yet...I see it in your feverish eyes! The desire still burns in you for what fantasy, at its best, can provide: a respite from the toil and routine of the workaday existence, an ad-

dition even when you're just wasting it.

Oh, sooner or later you'll get around to the main quest of finding and freeing the four Elden mages and the other forty original candle guardians, all of whom are trapped somewhere on the vast, sinister, unexplored continent of Gurtex. But there's no hurry about it. Take your time. Wander around and see the sights, chat with the inhabitants. Enjoy!

Everybody in the world of *Magic*

*Candle II* lives his or her own quasi-existence, working at a real job and possessing highly individual skills, talents, and character traits. There are 31 people and halfings you can recruit; some will join your quests for a long time, some just for a particular segment of the game that personally interests them. Some will join because they love adventure, some because they're bored with life at King Rebnard's court, and some just because you pay them and give them a cut of the loot (these hirelings, though often powerful warriors, have a tendency to leave you, usually at a bad time, unless they're kept happy



Before venturing into the dangerous continent of Gurtex, be sure to talk to everyone at the Palace on Oshcrum.



The game system in *Magic Candle II* allows you to send party members various places — to earn money or study, for example — and rejoin you later.



Using the Soul-speak spell to communicate with the undead. It's especially useful during the latter stage of the game.

venturous sojourn into a world more vivid, more beautiful, more enchantingly dangerous, than our own, a world where you can savor triumphs won through your own might and cunning, a world where magic works and Good and Evil present themselves clearly.

Despair not, friend! I have the remedy for your ailment! 'Tis called *Magic Candle II*, and it takes you to a world where traditional clichés are stood on their heads, a world where you can roam freely according to your whims, moods, and hunches, having a wonderful

# THE FOUR AND FORTY



The world of Magic Candle II has a vivid texture that invites exploration just for the fun of it.

with regular infusions of cash and spoils).

The game system in *Magic Candle II* gives you amazingly realistic flexibility over the comings and goings of your party. You can assign someone to wait in a certain place and do a certain thing — working as a gem cutter, for instance, amassing gold for the party — until you come back for him. You can dispatch individuals to different locations and then rendezvous with them later. Or you can order them to go perform important supporting tasks while you lead the remainder of the party elsewhere. The system works marvelously well, and adds a fine patina of realism to the characters' activities. As long as your characters engage in purposeful activities, the story will grow, its textures becoming richer and more involving.

Hate note-taking, you say? Sick and tired of having to write down every bit of information, no matter how seemingly trivial, on the chance that it may prove critical 20 hours

later in the game? Fear not: *Magic Candle II* has a note-taking system which automatically records every exchange of dialogue, and also tells you when and where the exchange took place. You can save these packets of notes to your hard drive, and call them up easily for consultation; you can even print them out, so you'll have a running chronicle of your progress.

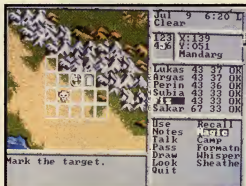
Yes, of course you want to play *Magic Candle II* — it's a sheer delight, that I promise you. Some strategy suggestions? Well, the game is so open and nonlinear that you can follow a hundred paths and still get to the right places. Is that a tenuous gold piece you're handing me? Oh, very well, then, here are a few good opening tips:

Although the main action takes place on Gurtex, be sure not to leave the island of Oschrund until you've explored it thoroughly. When you first land in Telermain, make sure you purchase a good supply of lock picks (or get them in the village of Ketrop). There are two spellcasters on Oschrund who will join your party, and having them both along will greatly strengthen you. One is the old wizard Rinfiztrik, whom you'll find in the Knight's Room at the palace.

Oh! Fiz only has one spellbook, however, so you should obtain another one from Faranim, up in Ketrop, and make a quick sea voyage to the northeast, where the wizard Ziyx has yet another

compendium. Have your magic-capable characters swap spell books and waste no opportunity to have them memorize spells (you can never, *ever*, have too many Resurrect spells).

When you encounter the lady Subia in the throne room, you may be tempted to take her along when you go to clean out the monsters in the palace cellar. Don't. Combat is not her thing, and you'll really need her only when you go looking for lost Llendora. And finally, be sure



Spells must be memorized in advance, then recalled before you can use them in combat.

to visit the temple west of the river near Ketrop before setting sail for the perilous shore of Gurtex.

No, no, enough tips for now! I have heard a reliable rumor, though, which states that the latest upgrade of *Magic Candle II* offers mouse support, making a delightful game all that much easier to play.

What, closing time already? Well, come on, then — I know a little place down by the waterfront that never closes....

GP



Be sure to visit the wizard Ziyx before sailing on the Gurtex. While you're there, harvest the mushrooms that grow on his island.

**Hardware requirements:** 512K RAM; hard disk; VGA, EGA, or Tandy graphics; supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster.

# DR. QUANDARY

**LESLIE EISER**

It's Saturday night, and the hottest game in town is at the amusement park. Check out the ferris wheel if you must, but for real action head for the Shoot the Troggle booth. Dr. Quandary is giving away free games there — but when you win, you really lose.

Oh sure, you might *feel* lucky as you pick out one of his lifelike action dolls as a prize, but your choice gives Dr. Quandary the opportunity to seize your body, transplant your mind into one of his dolls, and teleport you into his bizarre fantasy world. To save yourself you'll need to whip up a batch of Fixer Elixir by gathering the 12 ingredients and then cooking the mixture according to directions.

As you explore the island looking for the ingredients, you'll stumble across a series of 14 puzzles which Dr. Quan-



Are you able to beat the beachette at her own game?

dary has put in your way. Each puzzle interrupts your explorations, challenging you to play a game, put

a jigsaw together, or traverse a maze. Win a game or solve a puzzle, and you get a reward that might be a useful component of Fixer Elixir — but you must check out the encrypted recipe to know for sure. Your future may well depend on realizing that a “number tumbler” is a padlock, or that “under-the-desk ornament” is a reference to ABC (already-been-chewed) gum!

As you solve each puzzle, another section of the path around the island is revealed, leading to more puzzles. Eventually your pockets will be stuffed full of junk, and all that's left to do is the cooking. Find a large pot, add the cor-



*Not everyone on the Island of Dr. Quandary is friendly. This one looks like he might make an ape out of D. Feecult!*

rect ingredients, and bring the brew to a boil. One sip of the finished potion and *zap!* -- you're back at the carnival, ready to play again.

In keeping with its educational focus, the challenges in *The Island of Dr. Quandy*, from MECC, are primarily of the thinking-cap variety. There are jigsaw puzzles, memory challenges, and several "plan ahead" activities reminiscent of Towers of Hanoi. Standard brainteasers like Num Lock (a version of Mastermind) and the DiscAppear (a version of a traditional matchstick game) are generated randomly, so the game takes a different course each time you play.

Each puzzle must be solved once to find the required components of Fixer Elixir, but you can play any of them repeatedly just for fun. At the two higher levels, additional complexities are added to make solving the puzzles a bit tougher — the maze gets longer, the Ape demands that you copy him more often, and the wind picks up in the shooting gallery.

Interestingly, *Dr. Quidary's* storyline bears a marked resemblance to that of Sierra's *Castle of Dr. Brain*. Both games put you into the mad clutches of a brilliant but eccentric scientist, and challenge you with a series of mind-boggling

puzzles. But despite their similar themes, *Dr. Brain* and *Dr. Quandary* differ in some critical aspects.

For starters, *Dr. Quandary* is targeted towards a decidedly younger audience. There are fewer puzzles with easier solutions, and clues are more informative. You can choose to leave a puzzle, or decide to solve another as much as you like. Most importantly, the game is short. My eight-year-old only needed about 2 hours to play through the game at the easiest level.

*Dr. Quandary* is MECC's first real departure from scholarly programs into the world of mainstream home software. By combining decent VGA graphics, nicely orchestrated sound effects, and some traditional puzzles into a challenging and absorbing adventure, *Dr. Quandary* provides a beginning gamer with an interesting introduction to the genre. Whether or not solving puzzles is educational, though, is a different question.

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; 10 MHz or better recommended; VGA or MCGA graphics; hard disk; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster; supports mouse.



## BLOODWYCH

NEIL RANDALL

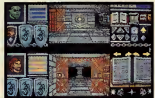
Like so many role-playing games being released lately, *Bloodwych* offers a first-person viewpoint with strong 3-D graphics. Also like most of these games, your task in *Bloodwych* is to make your careful way past a number of different levels, with an ultimate goal of defeating an overriding evil.

But despite these similarities, *Bloodwych* is very much its own game, with an interface unlike most other RPGs available today. And not only is the interface unique, it's also efficient and well-designed — not without its problems, but strong nonetheless.

Let's look at the problems first. Movement is cumbersome in *Bloodwych*: you click on a directional arrow of a compass rose to move your party from place to place, and the small arrows can make it difficult to move efficiently. You can bypass the compass rose and use the keyboard to direct movement, but those controls are based on the I-O-P-K-L key combination rather than the arrow keys or the keypad. Larger arrows on the compass rose and snappier mouse action are essential if the *Bloodwych* saga is to continue, and the keyboard interface needs reworking.

If your idea of fantasy role-playing is to cast you in the role of a specific character, rather than of an entire party, *Bloodwych* succeeds very well. You are a member of the Bloodwych, a secret order of mages, and you must recruit a party to defeat the Lord of Entropy (which, by the way, seems to be an oxymoron). At the beginning of the game, you select the one champion you will represent, and you continue to represent that character throughout (even though you switch leaders during your quest). When that

character dies, it's over. This is an extremely nice touch, because in most games you "role-play" the entire party at once, preventing you from



*You'll be confronted with many doors as you travel. Click on the button at the side of the door to open it. If it's locked, use a key.*

identifying strongly just one of its members. Here you seem to have more at stake.

There are a few minor problems involving some non-intuitive actions. Basically, you select one of your four party members to be the leader, which is the character you directly control (though switching leaders is certainly easy). In combat you establish an action for the party as a whole, not for each character, but you retain direct control over the current leader. What this means is that you're best off making your main spellcaster the leader, so that you may determine the spells he/she will unleash. This is fine, except that it's unintuitive — after all, you're supposed to be representing one champion, who may or may not be a spellcaster — and consequently takes considerable practice to use effectively.

But these minor problems are more than compensated for by some nice very touches, especially in the use of fantasy-like elements. Each character is of a different "psyche type", and these are represented by the four suits in a deck of playing cards. Fighters tend to be spades, while mages are clubs. Adventurers, represented by hearts, are the best

talkers and generalists, while archers and assassins are diamonds. The trick is to blend these suits to form the best all-around party.

Another four-part fantasy element is the color scheme for magic, which also reflects the scheme of the towers you will visit. Serpent (physical) magic is represented by the color green (on the character's suit and shield), moon (illusory) magic is blue, dragon (fire)



magic is red, and chaos (life) magic is yellow. The point is that both systems reflect the kinds of mystical systems you might expect to find in fantasy, and they fit into game play quite well.

To get you going and keep you going, the 24-page manual contains hints for each of the game's seven locations. Keep a map (it's crucial), and start exploring. This one's enjoyable, despite some flaws in the

GP

*From the character selection screen, select the champion you will represent throughout the game.*

**Hardware requirements:**  
512K minimum memory;  
hard drive recommended;  
VGA, EGA, or CGA graphics;  
supports Roland and Ad Lib  
sound cards; mouse recom-  
mended.

# SNOOPY'S GAME CLUB

LANCE ELKO

Kids love Peanuts cartoons, comic-strips, stuffed animals, pajamas...you name it. And it's not just the younger set that's charmed by Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Lucy, Woodstock, and the rest of the Peanuts gang. Going after a Peanuts' license is very smart business, and that's just what Accolade did with *Snoopy's Game Club*.

Targeted to ages 3-8, this learning title does justice to the quality of its license. *Snoopy's Game Club* is a collection of three different games, each one based on traditional themes. While there's nothing original about the games, they're all wonderfully rendered, with a nice number of variables for tailoring play to different learning levels. And



*Charlie Brown's Picture Pairs is based on the classic Concentration game—match all the tiles, and the screen underneath comes to life.*

*Snoopy's Game Club* really shines in areas that are key to holding a child's attention—graphics, animation, and sound and music (for those with a sound card).

Charlie Brown's Picture Pairs is the traditional Concentration game, in which you turn over tiles to find match-

ing pairs. There are enough play variations here to challenge a wide range of ages. You can select four pairs for younger kids or nine pairs for older ones. You can choose to match Peanuts characters, pictures of various objects, or for kids learning their alphabet, upper-case or lower-case letters. If you choose letters, one of the Peanuts characters will say the letter after a match is made (again, for those with sound cards).

Other options include a quick peek at the matching tile after the first is selected; a one-player game with a timer; a two-player game with a scoreboard; a contest against any Peanuts character you wish to challenge (Charlie Brown is the easiest opponent, Snoopy's the toughest); and a choice of displaying pictures on top of the tiles (for the very young) or hiding the pictures.

When you match a pair, the retired tiles exit the board in one of several charming animated sequences. Match all the pairs and a delightful full-screen animation is revealed.

Snoopy's Animated Puzzles, the second game, lets you select from any of nine different pictures that can be



*Woodstock's Look-Alikes can be tough—some of the characters have very subtle differences.*

scrambled into 4, 9, 16, 25, 36, 49, or 64 pieces. The animation in each puzzle remains in place after scrambling. This game, too, has a one- or two-player option, and a Snoopy icon is available if you need any help.

Woodstock's Look-Alikes is a six-round game in which you elect to place 6, 12, or 18 figures on the board. They all look quite similar, but each has an identical match. If the child has any trouble (the variations in some cases are slight), a Show Me option is available. Woodstock's Look-Alikes lets you take on any Peanuts character, or select a one- or two-player game.

Most kids in the targeted age-range will require adult supervision with any of these games until he or she is comfortable with each game's setup. And when starting out, adults will need to consult the manual to get acquainted with the functions of the game's variety of icons. The game functions well with a keyboard or joystick, but is much smoother with a mouse.

*Snoopy's Game Club* won't win a first-place award for originality, but it certainly deserves one for sparkling execution. It's a delight for the younger set.

GP



*You can scramble any of nine animated screens into as many as 64 pieces in Snoopy's Animated Puzzles.*

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; VGA, MCGA, EGA graphics; hard disk required; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster and Roland MT-32 sound cards; supports joystick and mouse (recommended).

## TREASURES OF THE SAVAGE FRONTIER

NEIL RANDALL

This game is the sequel to *Gateway to the Savage Frontier*, last year's initial episode in what is certain to be a continuing series in SSI's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons line of fantasy role-playing games. One AD&D series is concluded (the Pool of Radiance series, which began it all), but with the *Savage Frontier* and the *Krynn* series still on the go, there will be no lack of AD&D games for insatiable role-players to indulge themselves.

If you've learned any one

ety of races and professions to choose from, and a mixed party is the best choice. You'll definitely need fighters and magic-users, but a thief is certainly a good option as well. As you travel, non-player characters will also join the party, if only for a short while.

You move the party through cities, dungeons, and outdoors along a large-area map, encountering enemies and a few friends as you go. You'll need places to rest and

recuperate, to store your valuables, to train to increase in capabilities, and soon. Learning all there is to know about the system takes some time, but with ten save-game positions you can go a long way without having to start over from scratch.

SSI keeps streamlining the interface of these games, but more impressive is the way the designers are streamlining the plot. Many RPGs offer an overall plot with a series of necessary but sometimes annoying sub-plots or mini-quests. Here, you begin with a bare-bones story, and as you adventure you discover more that must be done. The result is that you have no real idea whether or not you're pro-

gressing at a fast or slow pace, or, for that matter, exactly where all your activity is leading. All you know is that there's evil afoot, but it keeps showing up in different guises and places. This is a refreshing change because not only does this style of episodic plot revelation stick with the concept of the original *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game, but it also brings more depth to game play and offers a greater sense of realism.

You're helped in your journey by your old friend Aminitas, whom you can consult every time you encamp. He repeats his last set of instructions so you don't forget what you're doing, an enormously helpful feature if you're the kind of player who doesn't bother writing down everything you find out. This is another example of the increasing user-friendliness of SSI's AD&D gaming system.

The most commendable feature of all the AD&D games is that the latest one is always the best one for a newcomer to the system and, simultaneously, the richest one for an experienced player to work through. In other words, SSI makes each installment better than the last, and if you liked the last one you're sure to like the newest. Graphics in general are due for an overall improvement — and they'll be here this fall — but there's still a lot of life left in the series as it stands.

GP



At one point in the game, you'll find yourself bound hand and foot and tossed unceremoniously into the sea. Not to worry; there are some good guys down there waiting to help.

of these games, you can easily play the rest. That, in fact, is probably the best single feature of this line of games. Not only does *Treasures of the Savage Frontier* continue the story of the ongoing troubles of that geographical area, it also continues the game interface itself. With each AD&D release, SSI tweaks that interface a bit, but for veterans, playing a new AD&D game is simply a matter of installing it on your hard drive, firing it up, and diving in head-first. You can even use your saved *Gateway* games in this sequel, without having to clumsily transfer characters from one to the other.

As in all these games, you create (or re-use) up to six characters to constitute a party of adventurers. There's a vari-



A typical battle scene from *Treasures*. You have control over every character in the party.

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; hard drive; VGA or EGA graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Tandy sound cards; supports mouse.

# AMERICAN GLADIATORS

CHRIS SLATE

**G**emini, Nitro, Turbo, Thunder, Laser, Ice, Blaze, Lace, Gold, and Zap — ten of the most pumped-up men and women ever to share the same television screen, and you get to challenge them all in *American Gladiators* from Gametek.

Based on the off-the-wall sports game show of the same name, *American Gladiators* features all the same bone-crushing events that have made the show a success. Take "Assault," for example. In this



The "Eliminator" is the toughest event of them all. You'll have to go up and over many different obstacles to reach the finish line in time. You get bonus points for time remaining, and points are deducted for every obstacle you hit.

contest, you're given 60 seconds to score as many points as you can by firing at a target with an air bazooka while dodging a Gladiator's attacks. In "Joust," you wield a seven-foot pugil stick to knock the Gladiator from his or her platform. The "Human Cannonball" is perhaps the easiest event — simply line up two power bars to swing into a Gladiator stationed on a platform.

While most of the events demand brute strength, the "Wall" requires speed and dexterity. You're given 30 seconds to climb to the top of the wall, and if you fall too far behind, a Gladiator sends you back down — the hard way. In

Good defense is just as important as offense in "Joust." Whichever combatant is left standing when time expires is the winner.



the "Atlasphere" you roll about in giant metal spheres while trying to score in any of the five pods placed around you.

"Powerball" is one of the toughest events. You have to battle your way through defending Gladiators as you try to score by putting balls into baskets placed around the playing field. The final event, the "Eliminator," is exhausting. You'll be pounding your fire button as you race through the ultimate obstacle course. After

take a few more tries before you can win every event. In most sports games, there's still room to improve, even when you can win every time. However, the events in *American Gladiators* are so simple that there just isn't much you can do with them once you've won.

Of course, you can get more mileage out of the events by competing against a friend, but there's a problem with the two-player mode. While one player can choose between playing with a joystick or keyboard, the other player must always use the keyboard, even if you have two joystick ports. This creates a lot of confusion because the person using the joystick must also use the keyboard to pick up items.

On the plus side, the graphics are large and colorful. As we mentioned earlier, most of the events can be fun to play — for the first few times. Because of its simple game play and relatively low level of difficulty, younger players will probably get a lot more out of this game than will experienced PC gamers.



In "Assault," you'll need to dodge the Gladiator's shots while you fire air cannons at a target mounted at the far end of the room.

the race, the scores are tallied from all of the events to see who really is the ultimate Gladiator.

While most of the events in *American Gladiators* can be pretty fun at times, the game still has its share of problems. First of all, game play isn't very involved; you can sit down and play all the way through in your first session, and it should only

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; supports AdLib and Roland sound cards; joystick recommended.

GP



# BATTLE ISLE

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

**B**attle Isle is the first war game from the respected French software company Ubi Soft. There can be no question that it is inspired by the classic TurboGrafx-16 war game, *Military Madness*, for it is virtually identical in layout and play. But even PC gamers who have played *Military Madness* might want to give *Battle Isle* a try, because it has a lot going for it.



Awesome firepower is at your disposal — alas, the computer usually has more of it than you do.

For one thing, it looks terrific. Japanese-designed war games, no matter how ingenious their design, always tend to look like the graphics were done by the same people who did the "Speed Racer" cartoons. *Battle Isle*'s graphics are splendid in detail, but appropriately muted and businesslike in color.

Why are you fighting these battles? Well, it seems that a galactic empire called the Druller is searching for a mercenary champion to defeat armadas of renegade androids. There's even a 22-page "novelle," as badly written and utterly as pointless this kind of thing usually is, setting up the background. Very few (if any) war-gamers need a bogus sci-fi scenario to bolster their imagination before plunging into a game like this, and you'll miss nothing of consequence by ignoring the farfetched plot.

*Battle Isle* has 32 different stages, all of them involving island terrain, some of it quite

elaborate. Two human players can wage war against each other, or one human can do battle against a very tough computer opponent. You cannot advance to the next campaign until you are victorious in the current one, at which time the computer gives you a password. You can refeit any scenario you wish by entering the password during game set-up.

Range and maneuver are determined by the classic hex-grid system, and battles are fought in action and movement phases. At the start, Player One gets to move and Player Two gets to fire; on the second turn, the phases are swapped, and so on until the end of the game. You may opt for

a short game of 4, 8, or 16 turns, or a no-limit game which continues until one side has achieved total victory.

The first two introductory scenarios are fairly simple, although not without challenge. Thereafter, the scenarios take an exponential leap in difficulty, especially if you're playing against the computer, and a wide assortment of land, sea, and air units become available. Each side also has buildings, which serve as strategic targets and resources: damaged units can be repaired at depots and headquarters, and new units can be constructed at factories, provided you supply them with enough energy. The energy comes in the form of a substance called "aluminium," which must be gathered and transported under fire.

When combat is joined,

there are colorful animated battle sequences — identical to those in *Military Madness* — that show you the results. When a unit reaches 50-percent effectiveness, send it back for repairs immediately, or you'll probably lose it on the next turn.

*Battle Isle* has one weakness: the interface. It's a real pick-and-shovel affair that requires input from both joystick and keyboard. Mouse support is available, but you'll probably get a sore wrist from hauling the cursor back to where it belongs after overshooting the hex on which you were trying to place it.

Gamers who are hooked on the sexy graphic blandishments and velvety interface of *The Perfect General* may turn up their noses at *Battle Isle*, but for what it is — a highly derivative, generic sort of



product — it's a solid achievement: easy to get into, hard to master, and handsome to look at.

**GP**

The graphics in the introductory sequence are great, but have nothing to do with game play.

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; hard drive; supports AdLib and compatible sound cards; supports mouse; joystick recommended.

# THE FINAL CONFLICT

JEFF SEIKEN

If computer game packages had to pass a truth-in-advertising test, *The Final Conflict* would have some problems. Produced by Impressions and distributed in North America by Merit Software, the copy on the front of the box for *The Final Conflict* bills it as "a simulation of power politics and global warfare." While that sounds like a reasonable basis for a PC game — after all, plenty of titles in the past have dealt with the same topic — there's one problem: the claim is wrong.

For starters, *The Final Conflict* has about as much simulation value as the board game Risk, and its political content is also virtually nil.



From the world map display, you can see at a glance which countries are neutral (yellow), hostile (red), and friendly (green).

Even the part about global warfare misses the mark, since all five of the scenarios that come with the game involve regional conflicts.

And the misinformation doesn't end here. Turning to the back of the box, you read: "Your armies and navies are ready...and, if it should come to it...so are your nuclear missiles." If you concluded from this statement that *The Final Conflict* is primarily a game of conventional warfare with some nuclear brinkmanship mixed in, you'd be fooled again. Far from being weapons of last resort, nuclear missiles are treated as just another part of your arsenal, to be used freely and frequently

without repercussion. The manual does make a vague reference to nuclear winter, but I've yet to see it happen, even after I plastered the enemy with every available warhead.

Taken as a whole, the statements on the box are distortions rather than outright falsehoods. Nonetheless, there's still reason to feel aggrieved. Both the box copy and the introduction in the manual lead you to expect a game of far more sophistication and subtlety than you actually get, and this does a disservice to both the consumer and the product.

Now that you know what *The Final Conflict* isn't, let me say a few things about what the game is. In plain terms, *The Final Conflict* is an abstract strategy game in a real-world setting, pitting two coalitions of nations in a fight to the death. The scenarios range from a hot-war confrontation between the old Cold War antagonists to a United States-South America showdown. A scenario editor also enables you to design any number of additional conflicts, thus guaranteeing that the world will never again see peace in our time.

In *The Final Conflict*, the complex business of waging war is reduced to an extremely basic level. Each side has an assortment of infantry, tank, naval, and missile units. To attack, you merely send units into hostile territory. Diplomats can be dispatched to influence neutral countries, while spies can ferret out information about the enemy. All of the action takes place in a real-time environment and, the pace of



Defend your territory against nuclear missiles in this arcade segment, which is essentially a prettier version of Missile Command.

the game often borders on the frantic.

Once you've gotten past the misleading packaging and scaled your expectations down to size, you'll find that *The Final Conflict* manages to be moderately entertaining and challenging. Still, the game is obviously a cut-rate production. Sound is practically nonexistent, the graphics are mediocre at best, and the interface is a model of inefficiency and wasted motion. (Incidentally, contrary to what the box claims, a mouse is not required. The game accepts keyboard input as long as a mouse driver is not loaded.)

Perhaps the most charitable way to describe *The Final Conflict* is to call it the computer game equivalent of a B-movie. Of course, even B-movies have their redeeming qualities, and so does *The Final Conflict*, especially if you have an affinity for fast-paced strategy games that take about ten minutes to learn and twenty minutes to master. But it's hard to recommend second-rate fare like *The Final Conflict* when there are so many quality alternatives around.

GP

**Hardware requirements:**  
640K minimum memory;  
VGA, EGA, or CGA graphics;  
supports AdLib sound card;  
mouse recommended.

# CARRIER STRIKE

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

A new game by Gary Grigsby (*Second Front*, *Western Front*, *Kampfgruppe*, etc.) is always cause for rejoicing among war-game aficionados. For *Second Front* and *Western Front*, Grigsby developed one of the most impressive and elegant war-game engines around; and in *Second Front*, he did a marvelous job of suggesting the sheer scope of war on the Russian Front.

Now, with virtually no advance fanfare, comes *Carrier*

historical inventory of ships, or you can allow the computer to randomize the forces based on what either side had available at that date. The ultimate test, however, is the campaign game, which links a two-year series of monthly engagements so that the results of one battle influence the components of the next battle.

Play takes place on three kinds of screens. First, there's the strategic map, on which players maneuver their task

forces and conduct search sweeps to locate the enemy. Missions are planned and launched on a schematic screen that represents the flight deck and hangar decks of each of your carriers. It's here that you arm, refuel, and deploy your planes, trying to maintain a solid CAP (Combat Air Patrol) over your own task force while trying to guess when the enemy will be unprotected and vulnerable to a strike by your Dauntlesses and Vindicators.

Combat is resolved on a third type of screen, showing either a representation of the opposing air forces engaging each other or a top-down view of one of the opposing fleets. When the bombers get through and attack ships, the results are shown by means of erupting watersplashes or thunderous explosions, while the computer keeps a running tally of what ordnance hit which ship.

Our first time out, we ambitiously played the American side at Midway and experienced the sickening sight of watching both the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet* get sunk during a single massive Japanese strike.

Parts of *Carrier Strike* are fairly complicated: shuffling

your planes around the flight deck for fueling, arming, and deployment takes a bit of practice, and there are an awful lot of commands that may need to be accessed during a single turn. The logic of SSI's interface helps make these chores manageable, especially with a mouse (by far the best way to play, although the keyboard commands, too, are well thought out), but in deference to this game's unusual complexity, Grigsby has forsworn his usual puritanical approach and actually included a tutorial — and a most helpful one at that.

Timing is everything in carrier tactics — you do not want to get caught by enemy bombers when your flight deck is jammed with fully loaded

strike aircraft! But other forms of naval action are also included in this remarkably thorough simulation, including gunnery engagements, submarine attacks, and bombardment of enemy shore installations.

Given the unusual number of naval combat simulations that have been announced by major game companies, 1993 shapes up as the Year of the Pacific War. SSI has led the way, however, with this engrossing and handsome simulation of some of the most epic sea-air battles in history. We recommend *Carrier Strike* most enthusiastically.

GP

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; hard drive; supports Adlib and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse recommended.



This operations screen allows you to refuel, rearm, and reorganize your carrier's complement of aircraft, then assign them missions. Timing is critical to good carrier tactics.

*Strike*, a Pacific Campaign game. Utilizing the same basic engine as the two "front" games, this SSI release manages to convincingly simulate the far-flung nature of the epic carrier battles of 1942-1944.

Individual games range from the first all-carrier battle in history, the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942), to the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" of June 1944, with stops along the way at Santa Cruz, the Solomons, and Midway. Grigsby even throws in a bloodthirsty hypothetical engagement called "Torokina," based on what might have happened if the Allies had chosen to storm the powerful Japanese fortress at Rabaul, rather than surrounding and neutralizing it.

You can play the individual battles with the exact



Graphics during airborne assaults on ships are simple but surprisingly effective.

# THUNDERHAWK

**JEFF LUNDRIGAN**

The box copy for this **Virgin** Games release touts it as the "ultimate helicopter combat simulator," and to be honest, it does have a lot in its favor. To begin with, it flies amazingly well. The graphics aren't very detailed — except for the occasional pyramidal mountain, the ground is completely smooth—but everything flows and moves as it should, especially on faster (386/16 or better) machines. Destroy an enemy and you'll see wonderful columns of smoke rise



The most dangerous enemies on the ground are ZSU57mm, or "Zoo-57" AA guns. Use Firestorm or Maverick missiles — they're almost impossible to kill with FFAR's or cannon.

from the burning wreckage, and you can pan, rotate, or zoom the satisfying external view.

The game thoughtfully includes a "simulator" mode which lets you fly around as much as you'd like without taking damage, making learning to pilot a helicopter as painless as possible. Later, it allows you to get in some practice with the different weapons systems the Thunderhawk is able to carry.

The actual missions in *Thunderhawk* are somewhat politically confused, but at least there's a lot of variety. You're given six theatres of operation with various levels of difficulty: the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central America, South America, Alaska, and Europe. Although the manual says you're flying for MERLIN, a



The Thunderhawk can carry an impressive amount of ordnance, but most are special-purpose weapons like SMARM anti-radar missiles. You're usually better off carrying a batch of AGM 214 Firestorms.

United Nations peacekeeping force, your commander keeps referring to the "American" bases, and even quotes President Bush when you're sent to destroy some South American drug lords. And though the manual clearly sets the game in 1995, during the European and Alaskan missions your commander specifically uses the word "Soviet" to describe the enemy forces.

You could forgive this strange oversight, except that oversights creep into other areas of the game as well. When you select joystick control, for example, the game completely disables the keyboard, leaving only a complicated system of button/joystick combinations for things like targeting, weapon selection, and engine throttle. This makes it awfully easy to do things like accidentally gain several hundred feet of altitude—which, by the way, leaves you open to attack by enemy fighters, who wouldn't bother you if you'd stayed low—when all you really wanted was to select air-to-air missiles. Imagine firing a missile, trying to switch targets but switching weapons instead, then overflying the target while trying to cycle back to the original weapon. And while all this is transpiring, you're getting pounded by ground fire because you couldn't destroy the anti-aircraft artillery now directly under you.

The game has a few other quirks. Because there are no friendly anti-aircraft batteries, enemy helicopters blithely follow you back to your base and harass you as you try to land (if the enemy has such command of the airspace over your base, why don't they just fly in and blow the place up?). Bridges have to be bombed dead-center or they won't even get scratched. One mission ended almost as soon as it began because the instant the joystick was touched the game jumped to the mission debriefing! None of these problems alone are fatal, but they do add up.

Still, given the smoothness of the animation and the large number and variety of missions, there's a lot to enjoy here. Even with its shortcomings, *Thunderhawk* still rates above average. The real disappointment is that, with more attention to details, *Thunderhawk* could have been a truly great game.

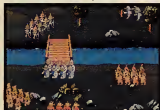
**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; hard drive; VGA, MCGA, or EGA graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick (joystick strongly recommended).



# FIGHTING FOR ROME

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

**F**ighting for Rome was designed by a British company called Impressions, and is distributed in the States by Merit Software. Impressions has pioneered a very distinctive look for their war games, basing their design on miniature figures and focusing on types of combat that lend themselves to such a treatment (they've even come up with the only computer simulation ever done of the Zulu Wars).



At first glance, *Fighting for Rome* looks very promising, with a great sense of style.

The first screens of *Fighting for Rome* make it clear this is an Impressions game: large-scale, richly detailed icons stand out dramatically against simple but colorful background terrain. Each infantry or archer icon represents 100 men, and each cavalry icon 50. In these Roman scenarios, the player may control armies of 3,000 to 10,000 men, mixing his various types of units as he likes, or allowing the computer to generate random armies for each side.

Impressions has come up with a very interesting interface for controlling these armies. First, you decide which scale of control you want for the coming battle: either one unit at a time, or groups of eight units at a time, depending on whether or not you're in the mood to micromanage your army's tactics.

Play is governed by a General Control Panel, which lets you switch to a map view of the whole battlefield, or access a running account of how each side is doing in terms of casualties and morale. For finer

control, click to the Unit Command Panel, where you can use logical point-and-click commands to tell your



The interface is interesting and easy to use; now if Impressions would only do something about those mouse drivers.

legionnaires where to march and how fast to do it, which formation to assume, and whether or not to launch missile attacks.

Once you've given the orders, just click on the "go" arrow and the battle commences in very plausible real time — i.e., given the one-by-one-third-mile scale of the battlefield, a unit of heavy infantry moves at about the rate a real unit of heavy infantry would move. If things are not going the way you like, you can freeze the action at any time and issue new orders to the appropriate units.

Up to the moment when actual combat is joined, we were really impressed with this game. But it appears that Impressions stopped work on the game just as they had something great ready to go. Scenes of actual fighting, for example, are static and bloodless; troops mixed up in melee combat just mingle together and twitch at each other. At no time do we get the flashing swords and bellowing elephants that made *Centurion's* battle scenes so appealing. Even a routed unit leaves behind no bodies, no sign of defeat.

If you're not playing with an AdLib or compatible sound card, you'll get absolutely no feedback on the screen to let you know your archers are

engaging the enemy. Except for twanging bowstrings, the archers simply stand there. Flying missiles are no great programming challenge — FRP games have been depicting them for years — and the inclusion of clouds of arrows or showers of javelins would have done wonders for this game.

An even more serious drawback is that when you put the game into scrolling mode in order to rapidly scan the battlefield, mouse control is so overly sensitive that any degree of accuracy is impossible. This condition is worse on some machines than on others, but we tested this game with five different mouse drivers, and in every case the scrolling mode was so unbearably twitchy that landing on the desired part of the screen was completely a matter of luck.

A call to Merit Software revealed that this problem can only be solved by recalibrating the scale of your mouse driver each time you play this game. Come, come, Impressions: this will not do in this day and age.

*Fighting for Rome* is a curious specimen: a terrific looking game with a novel and fascinating interface, yet it shoots itself in the foot when it comes to realism and scrolling. Much as we would like to recommend *Fighting for Rome*, we cannot, unless these two major flaws are corrected.

GP

**Hardware requirements:** 640K RAM; VGA, EGA, or CGA graphics; supports AdLib or compatible sound card (strongly recommended); requires mouse.

# ATOMINO

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

Just when you thought you'd seen the last of the Tetris-inspired games, here comes *Atomino* from Psygnosis. The game puts an interesting spin on the concept: the object is to construct complete molecules from loose atoms that are thrown into the playing area. Each atom has from one to four loose electrons circling it, and when a loose electron is able to pair off with another loose

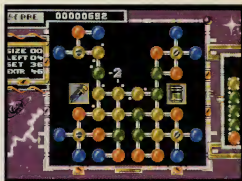
but faster as time goes on. As an atom is used in the field, it's removed from the bottom of the stack. If the stack overflows the pit, it's game over.

*Atomino* offers a little more variety than you usually find in this type of game. You've got a

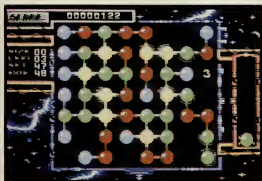
choice between two modes: Mode A is level-oriented and grows increasingly difficult, while Mode B is a mind-numbing "build-as many-molecules-as-you-can" game. Mode B plays just like it sounds: atoms fall, and you link them together as fast as you can until they're falling too fast to keep up with. The points you manage to accumulate by then is your only reward.

Mode A is a little more interesting. Each level requires something different, such as building a certain number of molecules of a certain size, or building them according to certain patterns. The levels naturally get harder as you continue to play—the patterns become more complicated, or the field begins to fill up with obstacles. Fortunately, you get passwords every now and then during Mode A, so you can come back and try again when you think your shattered nerves have recovered enough.

Even more insidious are the "extra rounds," bonus rounds where the entire playing field is completely filled with atoms. You're free to exchange atoms and move them around for as long as you wish—until you complete a molecule. Once anything disappears from the



Some levels include atoms that are fastened in place—notice the screws. The idea is to eliminate them, but you don't have to get them all at once.



If you're feeling lucky—or you're just not careful—you can build some pretty impressive looking molecules.

electron circling a nearby atom, they form a bond, and the two atoms become linked.

Lost? Don't worry too much. Although at first it sounds like you need a Ph.D. to play the game, it's surprisingly easy to get the hang of *Atomino*. All you have to do is figure out where the atoms will fit and put them there, although you can also swap the current loose atom for one already on the field. When you've bonded all the atoms to form a complete molecule with no loose electrons, it disappears from play, and you start over.

Oh, yes, you are under a time limit—what would this sort of game be like without that impending sense of doom that a ticking clock can bring? To the right of the playing field is a pit into which new atoms fall, slowly at first (of course)

playing field, the atoms begin to fall in the pit once again, and any atoms left on the field remain right where they are for the next round. What this means is that in order to survive, you've got to build the biggest molecule you can, preferably one that takes up the whole screen.

The measure of any Tetris style game is its addictiveness; just how strongly do you feel compelled to come back for more, knowing that you're eventually bound to lose? *Atomino* ranks surprisingly high on this scale, and you don't even run the risk of learning any chemistry in the process.

GP

**Hardware requirements:** 512K RAM; VGA, EGA, CGA, Tandy, or Hercules graphics; supports Adlib and Sound Blaster; supports joystick.

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